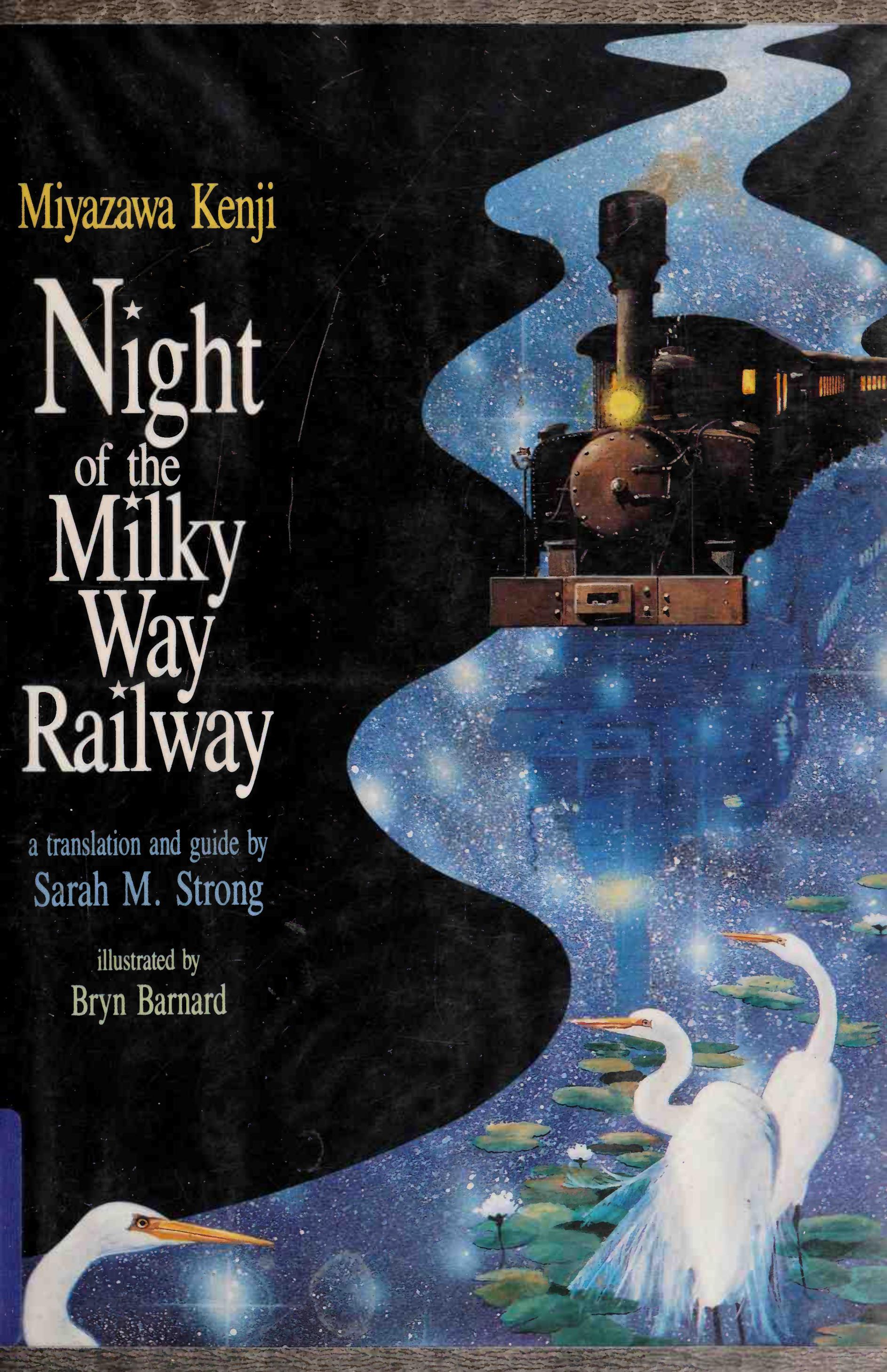


Miyazawa Kenji

Night of the Milky Way Railway

a translation and guide by
Sarah M. Strong

illustrated by
Bryn Barnard



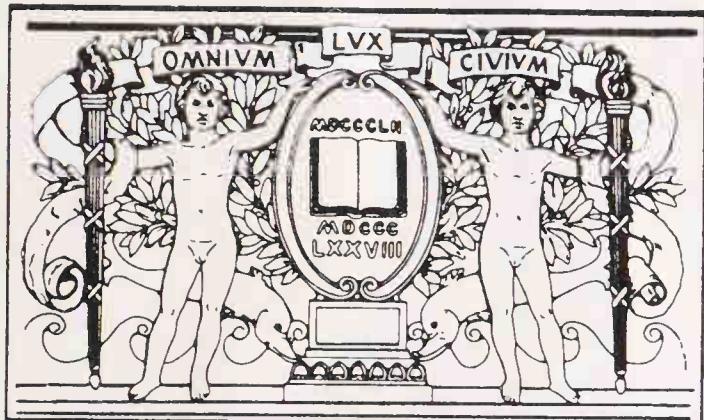
Miyazawa Kenji
Night of the Milky Way Railway
A Translation and Guide
by Sarah M. Strong, *Bates College*

Riding a magical night train on a celestial railway through the universe, two young friends encounter a host of unusual characters: a celestial corps of army engineers, a comical paleontologist digging away at the banks of the Milky Way, electrical squirrels, and shipwrecked children amid lighthouses for double stars. As we follow their journey we begin to realize this is much more than a child's tale. Miyazawa Kenji (1896–1933), one of Japan's most beloved poets and writers, has superimposed the Buddhist universe on the night sky and created an irresistible and sublime glimpse of a hereafter that is limited only by the reader's imagination.

Superbly translated and annotated by Sarah M. Strong, this is a compelling, magnetizing work, accessible on many levels. We are drawn back to the story again and again to discover new points of view allowing us to dig further into Kenji's stunning imagery and come up with our own unique visions.



Miyazawa Kenji



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Night of the Milky Way Railway



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by

Miyazawa
Kenji



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Sarah M. Strong*



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Bryn Barnard*

M.E. Sharpe, Inc.
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An East Gate Book

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To John, Anna, and Aaron

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S.M.S.

Introduction

When Giovanni, the young hero of *Night of the Milky Way Railway*, flees from the jeers of his classmates to the cool solace of the lonely hill outside of town, he has no inkling of the enormous journey on which he is embarking. But the dark hill and the column at its top together prove a cosmic pillar, a portal to the other world lying beyond (and above) earthly life.

With a blaze of light Giovanni finds himself traveling on a sort of celestial railroad. The course the train follows along the banks of the fantastic Milky Way river leads further and further south. From a starting point not far from Cygnus (overhead in summer in the northern hemisphere), the train travels down the sky, passing many familiar constellations, until it arrives at the Southern Cross (lying below the horizon of the northern hemisphere). The places visited and the sights seen along the way reflect actual astronomical phenomena, transformed to match the features of an inviting, ever-changing rural scene.

Giovanni's traveling companion on this surreal journey down the Milky Way is Campanella, the one classmate whom he trusts and counts as a friend. When Giovanni first sees his classmate on the seat directly in front of him, he notices that Campanella's jacket is wet. Gradually, as the journey progresses, other clues are given and the circumstances become clear; Campanella's jacket is wet from drowning, he is not

living but dead, the little train is in fact a ferry of souls.

At the Southern Cross most of the passengers disembark, bound for a Christian heaven that remains veiled from our view. Giovanni and Campanella are left behind on an almost empty train. Continuing, they come to the virtual center of our galaxy where they encounter yet another astronomical feature, the blackly gaping Coal Sack. For Giovanni and Campanella the Coal Sack appears as a terrible window affording an extragalactic view of utter emptiness. Mysterious, overpowering, it is both an invitation for further, more ultimate travel, and a warning to retreat.

In the wake of the forceful encounter with the Coal Sack, the boys' fantastic journey comes to a close. Campanella, drawn to a vision of his mother outside the window, disappears from the train. Giovanni suddenly finds himself in mundane space confronting the news that Campanella is missing and presumed drowned in the local river.

What Giovanni experiences on this extraterrestrial train trip challenges the power of our own imaginations. The tale's creator, the Japanese poet and storywriter Miyazawa Kenji, wrote in the 1920s from the point of view of a devout Buddhist, thoroughly familiar with traditional cosmology, and with a trained scientist's knowledge of astronomy. The landscapes through which Giovanni travels are at once fantastic and highly informed, their luminous beauty is immediately appealing but they harbor a seemingly endless array of nooks and nuances that prompt further exploration and repeated readings.

For all the interest in the afterlife in the history of religious thought, and for all the attention to near-death experiences in our more secular age, it is surprisingly rare in literature to find a sustained, nonsatirical fantasy of life after death. Why should writers be so shy of a subject holding such obvious and universal human interest? Something about the venture seems to overwhelm all but the most stalwart imaginations. Dante, of course,

was undaunted. One foot planted in Christian cosmology, the other in Ptolemaic astronomy, he fashioned a complete other world, beautiful in its exactness. Before him the T'ang poet Po Chü-i, tapping shamanistic and Taoist traditions, fashioned a very different world of shimmering opulence to house the spirit of the wronged imperial courtesan Yang T'ai-chen.

Night of the Milky Way Railway stands with boyish exuberance in the small but elite company of great fantasies of the afterlife. With its Buddhist—rather than Judeo-Christian—underpinnings, it offers a fresh appeal to Western readers; here nothing can be taken for granted, even the seemingly familiar yields surprise.

It is important to note that Giovanni, in contrast to all his fellow passengers on the Milky Way Railway, holds an extraordinary ticket enabling an eventual return to our mundane, three-dimensional world. By virtue of his imaginative power and craft as a writer, Miyazawa Kenji is able to turn and offer Giovanni's ticket to us all. The journey that awaits the reader is both uncanny and beautiful. One is unlikely to return from such travels unchanged.

*Night of the
Milky Way Railway*

1

The Afternoon Lesson

“As we have seen, this indistinct white band has been variously described as a river, as the residue of a flow of milk, and so forth. Who knows what it really is?”

The teacher directed his question to the entire class, pointing to the hazy white galactic sash that stretched from the top to the bottom of the big black star map mounted on the board.

Campanella raised his hand, followed by four or five others. Giovanni, too, started to raise his hand, then quickly stopped. He was sure he had read in a magazine somewhere that the band was made of stars. These days, however, Giovanni was always very sleepy in class. He had no books and no time to read. As a result, he had begun to feel that there was really nothing he understood very clearly.

The teacher spotted him immediately.

“Giovanni, I expect you know.”

Giovanni rose smartly to his feet, but once he was standing he could not come up with a clear answer. Zanelli peered round at him from the seat in front and snickered. By now Giovanni was flustered and he blushed bright red.

The teacher asked again, "If we were to examine the Milky Way through a large telescope, what, generally speaking, would it appear to be?"

Giovanni thought it really was made up of stars, but again could not get out a quick answer.

The teacher looked perplexed for a moment, but soon turned to Campanella.

"Well now, Campanella."

Now that his name was called, Campanella, who had raised his hand so energetically before, also stood hesitating, unable to answer.

The teacher, surprised, studied Campanella carefully for a moment, then quickly pointed to the star map himself.

"Well then, if we examine this hazy white Milky Way through a large telescope, it appears as many tiny stars. Wouldn't you agree, Giovanni?"

Giovanni nodded, blushing scarlet. His eyes, however, had already filled with tears.

—Yes, I knew that. And Campanella knows it too, of course. After all, his father is a professor. It was in the magazine we read together at his house. And then after we read the magazine, Campanella went and got a big book from his father's study. We opened it to the place marked Milky Way and for a long time the two of us looked together at the photograph, an inky black page crowded with white dots. It was beautiful. Campanella could not possibly have forgotten that. Still, he didn't answer right away. That's because he knows I have a job now in the mornings and afternoons. When I come to school I don't run around playing with the other kids any more and I hardly say a word to Campanella. He felt sorry for me and didn't answer the teacher on purpose.—

Thinking this, Giovanni felt an almost unbearable pang of sadness, for both himself and Campanella.

The teacher continued, "And if we think of the so-called River

of Heaven as an actual river, each one of those tiny stars would correspond to a grain of sand or bit of gravel on the river's bottom. If we think of it as an enormous flow of milk, it resembles a heavenly river even more. By that I mean each star corresponds to one of the minute droplets of fatty oil that float suspended in milk. Now you might ask, in that case, what corresponds to the water of the river? The answer would be, that which transmits light at a specific speed, in other words a pure vacuum. The sun and the earth float therein. This means that we ourselves are living in the waters of the Milky Way. Water appears bluer the deeper it is. In exactly the same way when we look around us on all sides from within the water of the Milky Way, the deeper and more distant the bottom of the river, the more numerous and densely clustered appear the stars, and, thus, the whiter and hazier they look. Please observe this model."

The teacher pointed to a large lens, convex on both sides, that contained many shining grains of sand.

"This is the shape of the Milky Way. We can imagine each one of these sparkling grains of sand as a star shining with its own light just like our sun. Our sun would be more or less in the center with the earth very close by. I want everyone to picture themselves standing at night in the center here and looking out all around them through the lens. On this side the lens is thin, so we see only a few shining grains of sand, in other words, stars. On this side and this side the glass is thick, so many shining sand grains, or stars, are visible and the farthest ones seem hazy white. This is the way the Milky Way is explained today. Time is up, so I will wait until our next science class to discuss what the size of this galactic lens must be and to consider various stars within it. Since tonight is the festival of the Milky Way I would like you all to go out and have a good look at the sky. That's all for today. Please put away your books."

For a while the classroom was filled with the noise of the

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students opening and closing their desk tops and stacking their books, but presently they all stood neatly at attention, bowed, and left the room.

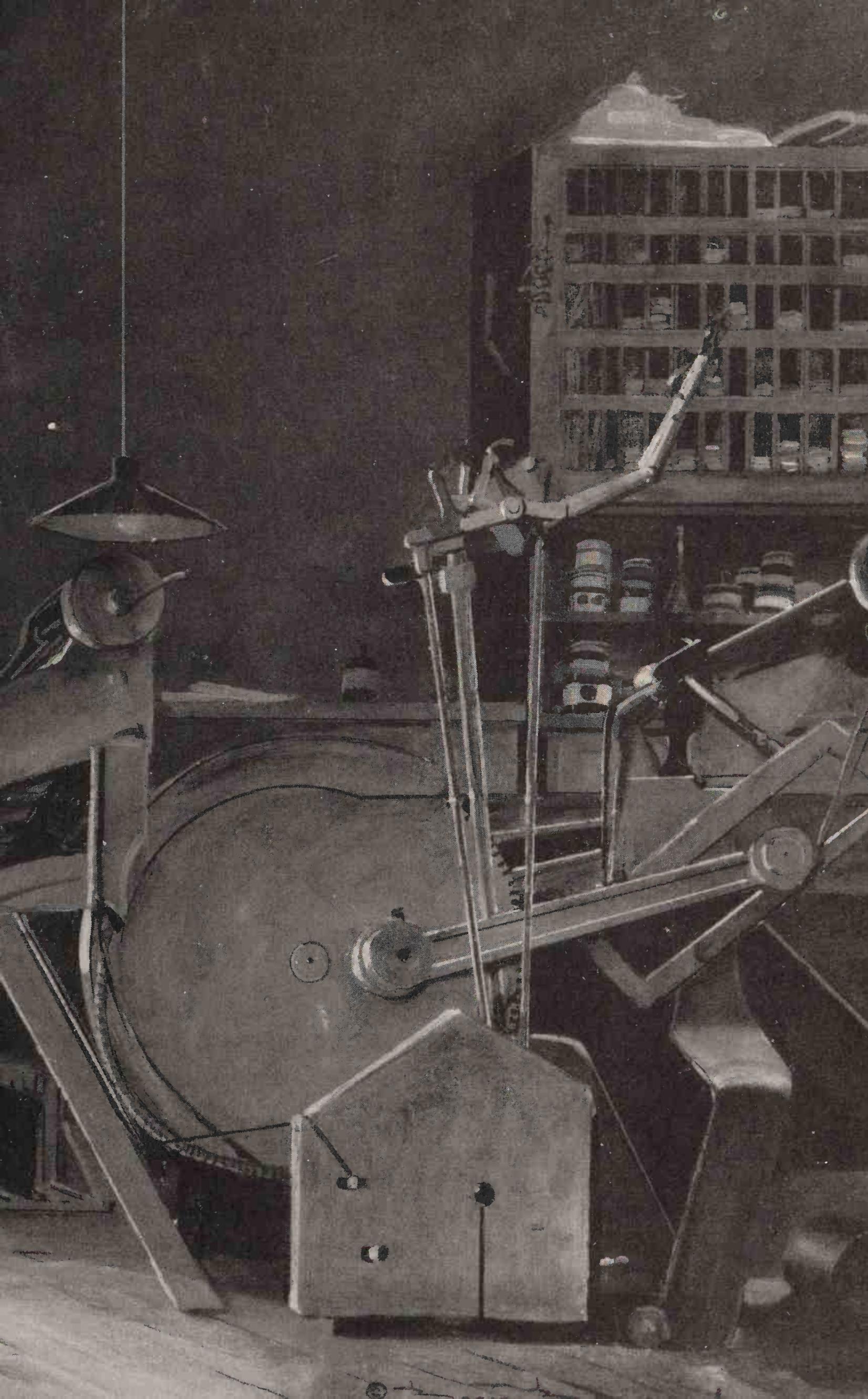
2

At the Printer's

As Giovanni left the school building he noticed that seven or eight of his classmates, instead of heading for home, had gathered near the cherry tree that stood in one corner of the school-yard. They seemed to be making plans for an expedition to gather crow gourds. These they would fashion into bluish-green lanterns to be set adrift on the river in the evening's star festival.

Giovanni, however, hurried out through the school gate with a determined swing to his step. He found the houses of the town already decorated for the Milky Way festival that night. There were hanging balls of yew sprigs and lanterns tied to cypress branches. Instead of starting for home, Giovanni wound his way through the village streets and went into a large printing shop. He quickly greeted the man in a baggy white shirt who sat at the teller's desk near the entrance, then removed his shoes and stepped in. In front of him was a large sliding door which he opened. Inside the lights were on, even though it was day, and several rotary printing presses were in noisy operation. Various people, some with strips of cloth tied around their heads, others wearing eyeshades, were busy with different chores, reading





things or counting with a drone that was almost like singing.

Giovanni went up to the high desk that was third from the doorway and greeted its occupant. The man searched on a shelf for a moment.

"I expect you can manage this bit," he said, handing Giovanni a slip of paper.

Giovanni picked up a small flat box from the foot of the man's desk. Across the room a number of electric lights were on. He went and crouched down near one corner of a slightly leaning wall of type boxes. Using a pair of tweezers, he began picking out pieces of type one after the other. Each was no bigger than a grain of millet. A man in a blue apron passed behind him.

"Need a magnifying glass there, Sonny?"

Four or five others nearby smiled coldly without saying a word or even turning in his direction. Giovanni, pausing again and again to rub his eyes, kept on busily collecting type.

A little after the clock had struck six, Giovanni took the flat box filled with the type he had collected and checked it once more against the slip of paper he held in his hand. He then brought it to the man at the desk who received it silently with an almost imperceptible nod.

Taking his leave, Giovanni opened the sliding door and went up to the teller's desk. The man in the white shirt, as silent as ever, handed Giovanni a small silver coin. Giovanni's face instantly brightened. He made an energetic bow, retrieved his bag from where he had left it below the desk, and dashed out of the building. Whistling brightly, he entered a baker's shop. He bought a loaf of bread and a bag of sugar cubes, then rushed off at top speed.

3

Home

The place to which Giovanni returned with such enthusiasm was a little house on one of the poorer back streets, the farthest to the left in a row of three doorways. Kale and asparagus had been planted in some empty crates near the entrance. The shades in the two tiny windows were drawn.

“Mother, I’m home. Have you been feeling badly?” Giovanni asked, slipping off his shoes.

“Ah Giovanni, you must be all tired out from work. No, it’s been so nice and cool today, I’m feeling much better.”

Giovanni stepped in from the entrance to find his mother lying down in the front room, resting, with a white kerchief tied around her head. Giovanni opened the window.

“Mother, I bought some sugar cubes today. I thought I’d put a few in some milk for you.”

“You go ahead and eat first. I don’t feel like having anything just yet.”

“When did Sister come home?”

“It was about three. She tidied everything up for me.”

“Your milk didn’t come?”

“Apparently not.”

“I’ll go and get it then.”

“I’m in no hurry. Please eat first. Your sister fixed some sort of tomato dish before she left. She set it down over there.”

“Well then, I’ll go ahead and eat.”

Giovanni took the plate of food from its place near the window and ate it hungrily together with the bread.

“You know Mother, I’m almost certain Father will be coming back soon.”

“I think so, too. But why do you feel so certain?”

“Because I read in the newspaper this morning that the fishing up north has been very good this year.”

“Yes, but it’s possible that your father hasn’t been fishing.”

“Of course he has. He couldn’t have done anything so wrong that they would put him in prison. The things Father brought home last time that he gave to the school—the big crab’s shell, the reindeer’s horn—they’re all in the specimen room. When the sixth-year students have class the teacher always brings them out.”

“Your Father said that this time he would bring you an otter skin jacket, didn’t he?”

“Everyone always says that to me when they see me. They say it to tease me.”

“Do they say mean things to you?”

“Yes, but not Campanella. He never does. When the others say things like that to me, Campanella gets upset.”

“His father and your father have been friends ever since they both were as young as you and Campanella.”

“That’s why Father used to take me along with him when he visited Campanella’s house. Things were nice then. I used to stop by Campanella’s a lot on my way home from school. He had a toy train that ran on alcohol. There were seven pieces of track and we would fit them together to make a circle. It had electricity

poles and a signal post, and the signal light would only turn green when the train passed. Once when the alcohol was all gone we used kerosene, but the boiler got all sooty.”

“Yes, I remember.”

“Now I go to their house to deliver the paper every morning but it’s always dead quiet still.”

“That’s because it’s so early.”

“They have a dog named Zoel. He’s got a tail just like a broom. When I go there he always follows after me whining. He follows me right to the edge of town, sometimes even farther. They say everyone’s going out tonight to float gourd lanterns on the river. I bet Zoel follows along too.”

“Oh that’s right, tonight is the Milky Way festival, isn’t it?”

“Yes, I’ll have a look when I go get the milk.”

“That’s fine, but don’t go out on the river.”

“I won’t. I’ll just watch from the bank. I’ll be back in an hour.”

“You can stay out longer. I won’t worry as long as you’re with Campanella.”

“Oh, I’ll be with him for sure. Shall I close the window before I go?”

“Yes, do please. It’s already cool enough.”

Giovanni rose, closed the window, and put away his supper things. He quickly pulled on his shoes, then called to his mother that he would be back in an hour and a half, and stepped out through the darkened doorway.

4

The Night of the Centaurus Festival

With his lips puckered in a lonely expression as though he were whistling, Giovanni came down the sloping dark cypress-lined street toward the town.

At the bottom of the hill stood a large street lamp splendidly aglow with a bluish-white light. As Giovanni came down nearer and nearer to the light, his shadow, which had been trailing behind him like a long dimly visible specter, quietly drew up beside him. Dark and sharply defined, it lifted its feet and swung its arms.

—I'm a great big locomotive racing down a steep grade. I'm passing the street lamp now. Look, now my shadow is a compass needle; it's spun round so that it's right in front of me.—

Engrossed in such thoughts, Giovanni passed with large strides beneath the street lamp. At that moment Zanelli, the boy who had snickered at him in school that afternoon, came out of a dark side street on the other side of the lamp. Zanelli was wearing a new shirt with a pointed collar. He brushed lightly past Giovanni.

Before Giovanni had time to ask if he was on his way to float crow gourds in the river, Zanelli shouted from behind him, hurling the words like stones, "Hey Giovanni, that otter skin jacket is going to come from your dad!" Giovanni felt his chest suddenly freeze. The air around him seemed to ring.

"What's that you say, Zanelli?" Giovanni shouted back, but Zanelli had already disappeared into a house hidden behind a hedge of arbor vitae.

—Why does Zanelli say things like that to me when I don't do anything to him? He looks just like a rat when he runs. He's got to be an idiot to say things like that to me when I don't do anything to him.—

All sorts of thoughts raced through Giovanni's head as he made his way along the beautifully decorated streets, full of lanterns and tree boughs. A bright neon light was burning at the clock store. There was an owl whose eyes of red stone rolled round every second, and various precious stones set on a thick glass plate the color of the sea. The stones turned in a slow circle like so many stars. Beyond the precious stones a bronze centaur was making its slow circular progress forward. In the middle of everything was a round black star map decorated with blue-green asparagus fronds.

Giovanni gazed at the map of the constellations, utterly absorbed. It was much smaller than the one he had seen at school that day, but it was made so that if one turned the plate, aligning it with the present date and time, the appropriate portion of sky would swing round until it appeared in the oval-shaped space. As expected, right down the middle of the oval space from its top to its bottom stretched the familiar filmy sash of the Milky Way. In its lowest part the Milky Way seemed to be exploding faintly, releasing a puff of vapor. Behind the map and the precious stones stood a small gleaming yellow telescope mounted on a tripod, and on the wall farthest back hung an enormous chart on which were drawn all the constellations in the

sky but in the shape of strange beasts, serpents, fish, water jars, and the like. Giovanni stood for a long while gazing at the chart, wondering if the sky really might be filled like that with scorpions and brave warriors. He thought he would like to go walking on and on forever among them. But he suddenly recalled his original errand and turned from the shop. Even though he worried about his jacket being too tight in the shoulders, he puffed out his chest and swung his arms broadly as he made his way through the town.

The utterly clear air flowed along the streets and through the shops like water. The street lamps were all swathed in boughs of blue-black fir and oak. The six plane trees in front of the power company had been hung with tiny lights and the whole place had the appearance of a mermaid village. Children in crisp new clothes dashed happily about, whistling the star song and shouting, "Centaurus, send the dew!" as they sent magnesium sparklers into showers of blue sparks. Giovanni, however, had once again let his head droop. With thoughts in sharp contrast to the gay scene nearby, he hurried off to the dairy.

Before long Giovanni arrived at a spot on the outskirts of the town where countless poplar trees floated up tall into the starry sky. He passed through the black gate of the dairy and stood in front of the darkened milk kitchen which smelled of cows. Pulling off his cap, he called out, "Good evening," but the house was hushed and still. No one seemed to be home.

Giovanni straightened his shoulders and shouted once again, "Hello, is anyone home?"

After a moment an old woman appeared and approached slowly as though she were in pain. She asked him in a mutter what he wanted.

Giovanni said as brightly as he could, "The milk wasn't delivered to our house today, so I came to get it."

"There's no one here now and I can't help you. You'd better wait 'til tomorrow."

As the woman spoke, she rubbed a spot beneath her reddened eye and peered down at Giovanni.

"My mother is sick so I really need it tonight."

"Well then, come back in a little while."

The woman seemed ready to go back in.

"All right, thanks."

Giovanni nodded and left the kitchen.

Just as he was about to turn the corner of the cross-shaped intersection in town, Giovanni caught sight of a jumbled cluster of shadows and dim white shirts in front of the dry goods shop that lay on the way to the river. Six or seven whistling and laughing schoolboys, each holding a crow gourd lantern, stood in a group. Their laughter and whistling had a familiar ring; they were Giovanni's classmates. Giovanni was startled and began to turn back, but he thought better of it and headed up the street with a bright, determined air.

He was going to ask if they were on their way to the river but found the words sticking in his throat.

Just then, Zanelli shouted out again, "Giovanni, an otter skin jacket is going to come for you!"

The others immediately followed suit, "Giovanni, an otter skin jacket is going to come for you!"

Giovanni blushed scarlet. No longer aware of whether he was walking or not, he began to hurry past the group. Then he spotted Campanella in their midst. Campanella was silent and smiling a little out of pity. He looked at Giovanni as though he guessed he would be angry.

Giovanni dodged those eyes as though he were fleeing them. A moment after he had passed by Campanella's tall frame, he heard the boys all start, each on his own, to whistle. As Giovanni turned the corner, he glanced back and saw Zanelli looking at him. Then Campanella, whistling even louder, walked off in the direction of the bridge that was dimly visible beyond. A wave of

inexpressible loneliness passed through Giovanni and he suddenly started to run. Some little children who were making a rumpus as they hopped about on one foot with their hands clapped over their ears thought Giovanni was running for the fun of it and shouted excitedly. Presently, Giovanni hurried off in the direction of the black hill.

5

The Pillar of the Weather Wheel

Behind the dairy farm there was a hill, not very steep. Beneath the stars of the northern Big Bear the smooth, black summit seemed hazy and, more than usual, to be gently linked to the hills beyond.

Giovanni began to climb quickly up the little wooded path already wet with dew. Between the inky black clumps of grass and dense bushes in various shapes, the little path shone, a white strand in the starlight. In the undergrowth were small insects with flashing blue lights. When a leaf happened to be lit up all blue-green from behind, it made Giovanni think of the crow gourd lanterns the boys had been carrying.

As he came out of the pitch-black woods of pine and oak, the sky suddenly opened out before him, vast and empty. He could see the Milky Way stretching with a soft white light from south to north, and he could make out the pillar of the weather wheel on the summit. Flowers, perhaps bell flowers or wild chrysanthemums, were blooming everywhere with a scent belonging to a





dream. A solitary bird passed over the hill, calling as it flew.

Giovanni came up to the foot of the weather wheel pillar that stood at the summit. Warm from running, he threw himself down in the cold grass. The lights of the town shone at the bottom of the darkness like the dragon palace at the bottom of the sea. The children's whistling, their voices in song, and torn fragments of their cries reached his ears faintly. The wind made a noise in the distance and the grass on the slope rustled softly. Giovanni's sweat-drenched shirt already felt chilled. His gaze swept across the black fields that stretched in the distance beyond the outskirts of town.

From the direction of the fields he could hear the sound of a train. The windows of the little train were a tiny row of red. When Giovanni considered that inside there were people on a journey laughing, peeling apples, doing all sorts of things, he felt unbearably lonely and shifted his gaze once again to the sky.

They say that white band across the sky is all made of stars.

But no matter how much he looked, the sky did not seem to be the cold empty place his teacher had described that afternoon. Quite the contrary; the longer he looked, the more he could not help feeling that it was a little world complete with things like woods and farms. Giovanni saw the blue star of Lyra twinkling brightly as it split first into three, then into four. Again and again these star pieces stretched out and then contracted their legs until, eventually, they were like mushrooms all long and extended. Next, even the town that lay below him grew hazy until it seemed like a cluster of many stars or else a single great cloud of smoke.

6

The Milky Way Station

Giovanni noticed that the pillar of the weather wheel directly behind him had turned into a sort of hazy triangular marker. For a while he watched as it pulsed on and off like a firefly. It gradually grew more and more distinct until at last it stood tall and motionless against the deep steel-blue field of sky. There it stood, straight as straight, clear as clear against the expanse of sky that was like a sheet of blue steel just pulled from the tempering furnace.

Giovanni heard a strange voice calling out, “Milky Way Station! Milky Way Station!”

At that moment everything before his eyes became suddenly bright as though the light from a trillion phosphorescent squid had been frozen at the same instant and dropped down into the sky, or as though a diamond company had pretended it was not making a good haul and had hoarded its diamonds in hopes of keeping the price high, but someone had suddenly turned the cache upside down and scattered diamonds everywhere. Dazzled, Giovanni rubbed his eyes over and over again.

Looking around him, Giovanni found that the noisy little train he had been riding on for some time now was continuing on its

way. In fact, Giovanni was seated, looking out the window of a narrow-gauge railway car. It was night and the carriage was lit by a row of small yellow lights. The seats in the carriage were covered with plush blue cloth and were almost all empty. Two big brass buttons gleamed on the shiny gray enamel wall across from Giovanni.

In the seat immediately in front of him he noticed a tall boy wearing a black jacket that looked wet. The boy's head was thrust out of the train window and he was gazing at the scene outside. Something about the boy's shoulders looked familiar and Giovanni burned with impatience to know who he was. Just as Giovanni was about to stick his own head out the window, the other boy suddenly withdrew his and looked in Giovanni's direction.

It was Campanella.

Giovanni was about to ask Campanella if he had been on the train very long when Campanella himself announced, "Everyone ran as fast as they could, but they were too late. Even Zanelli ran as fast as he could but he couldn't catch up."

—Ah, that's it, thought Giovanni to himself, we've all decided to go on a trip together.—

"Do you want to wait for the others somewhere?" he asked.

"Zanelli's already gone home," Campanella replied. "His father came for him."

For some reason, as Campanella spoke his face turned a little pale as though he were in pain. Observing him, Giovanni, too, had an odd sense of something left behind somewhere, and he was silent.

Peering out of the train window, however, Campanella soon recovered his good spirits and said excitedly, "Darn, I left without my water bottle, and I forgot my sketchbook too. It doesn't matter, though. We'll be at Cygnus Station soon. I'd really like to see some swans. I bet I'll be able to see them, even if they're flying way off across the river."

Campanella began examining a disk-shaped map, turning it around and around. Sure enough, the river of the Milky Way showed white down the center of the map and along its left bank ran a line of railway track heading further and further south. The wonderful thing about the map was how each station and triangular marker as well as all the springs and forests and such were shown in pretty blue and orange and green lights scattered across the disk which itself was as black as night. Giovanni felt as if he had seen the map somewhere before.

"It's made of obsidian, isn't it? Where did you buy it?" Giovanni asked.

"They gave it to me at the Milky Way Station. Didn't you get one too?"

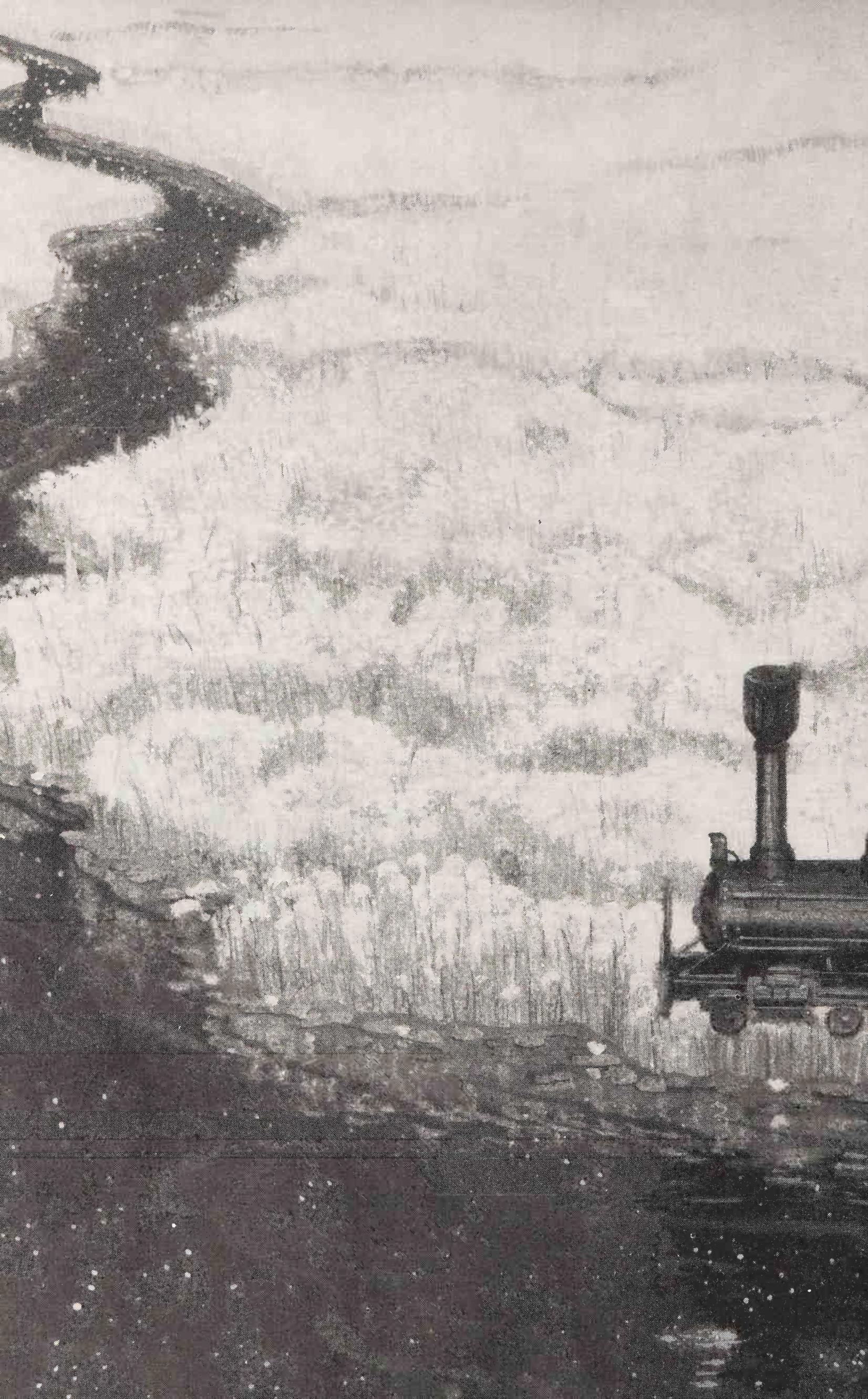
"I wonder if I was at the Milky Way Station? . . . Ah, this must be where we are now."

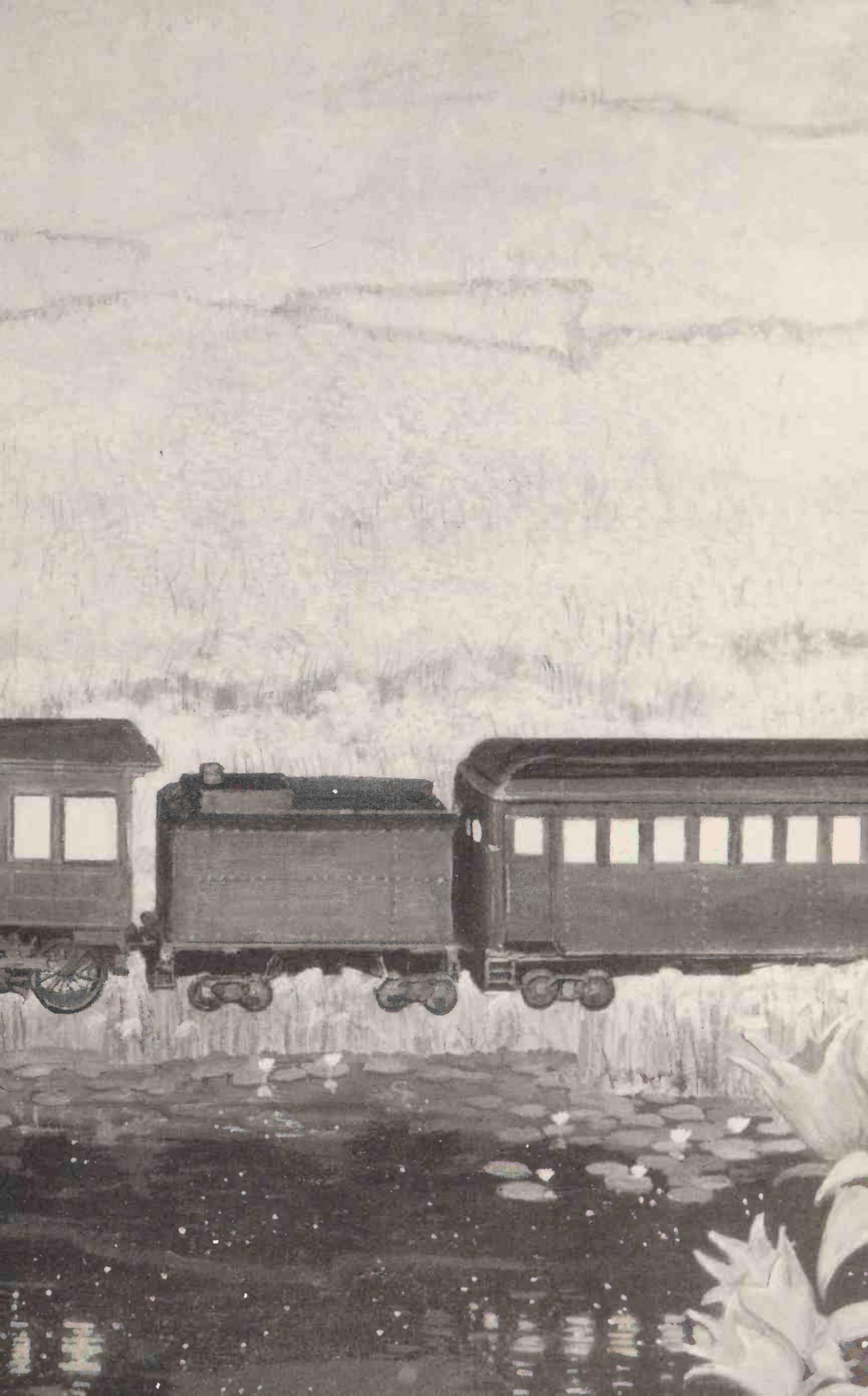
Giovanni pointed to a place just north of the spot labeled Cygnus Station.

"That's right," said Campanella. "Look over there, is that moonlight shining on the river bed?" They glanced out the window and watched as the silver pampas grass of the sky that grew along the palely shining banks of the Milky Way river rippled and swayed in the rustling wind.

"That's not moonlight. It's on account of the silver river of the Milky Way that it shines so."

As Giovanni spoke, he felt he wanted to leap for joy. Tapping his feet, he thrust his head out of the window and whistled the star song at top volume. He stretched himself out as far as he could, trying to see the water of the silver river. At first, try as he might, he could make out nothing. Gradually, however, he became aware of beautiful water, more transparent than glass or even hydrogen, flowing soundlessly on. It might have been a trick of the eyes, but at times the water seemed to form tiny purple ripples or to shine like a rainbow. In the fields here and there stood





beautiful phosphorescent triangular markers. The far ones were small and sharply etched in orange and yellow. The near ones were large and had a slightly hazy pale blue light. Set in various configurations, some triangular, some rectangular, some in the shape of a lightning bolt or loop of chain, they filled the fields with their light. Giovanni's heart pounded. He shook his head again and again. Then the beautiful triangular markers, shining blue and orange and all sorts of colors over the fields, trembled lightly and quivered as though each were breathing.

"We've come to the fields of heaven," Giovanni exclaimed. "And this train isn't burning coal, is it?" he added, looking toward the front of the train with his left hand thrust out of the window.

"It must be burning alcohol or else using electricity," Campanella concluded.

With a clickety-clack the pretty little train sped on and on through the celestial pampas grass waving in the wind, through the bluish glimmer from the water and the triangular lights.

"Gentians are blooming! It's fall already," Campanella exclaimed, pointing out of the window.

In the short grass by the side of the tracks were purple gentians so magnificent they might have been carved from moonstone.

"You want to see me jump down, pick some, and hop back up again?" said Giovanni, his heart racing.

"Too late, we've gone right past them already!"

But Campanella had no sooner spoken when the next clump of gentians flashed past them, shining brightly.

Then another clump, and another; countless gentian goblets with yellow bottoms passed before their eyes like seething water, like rain. Triangular markers stood in a row, glowing brighter and brighter as though they were on fire.

7

The Northern Cross and the Pliocene Coast

“I wonder if Mother will forgive me!” Campanella suddenly blurted out what was on his mind, his voice agitated, almost stuttering.

“That’s right,” thought Giovanni. “My mother is down there near that orange marker so far away it looks like a speck of dust, and she’s thinking about me.” He was silent and distracted.

“I would do anything to bring about my mother’s happiness. But what would my mother’s best happiness be?” Campanella appeared to be struggling hard to keep from crying.

“Nothing’s happened to your mother, has it?” exclaimed Giovanni in surprise.

“I don’t know. But if everyone does what is good, that’s the best happiness, right? So I think my mother will forgive me.” Campanella appeared to have made up his mind very definitely about something.

Suddenly the railway carriage was flooded with a bright, white light. When they looked, they saw water flowing soundlessly

over the Milky Way's glittering river bottom which itself seemed to be a collection of diamonds and dew and everything brilliant. In the midst of the flowing water was an island emitting a hazy corona of pale bluish light. On the level summit of the island stood a dazzling white cross perhaps forged from the frozen clouds of the northern pole. In eternal stillness it stood, crowned by a vivid golden halo.

Voices rose on all sides. "Hallelujah, Hallelujah!" The boys looked around to find their fellow passengers in the carriage all facing in the direction of the cross. Everyone was praying, their hands reverently folded, some pressing black bibles to their chests, others dangling rosaries of crystal. The folds of their pleated garments fell straight. Without thinking, the boys, too, rose smartly to their feet. Campanella's cheeks shone with the beautiful light of ripe apples.

Then the island and its cross were gradually left behind.

The far bank was clouded by a palely shining haze. Sometimes its silver would suddenly dim as though filmed over by breath, just the way the silver of pampas grass becomes cloudy when it is tossed by the wind. And the gentian flowers, so many, sometimes hidden, sometimes peeking out from the grass, seemed like softly burning will-o'-the-wisps.

This sight, too, was soon cut off by a row of pampas grass coming between the train and the river. Twice the island of Cygnus appeared behind them but it was already very distant and small, no bigger than a picture. The pampas grass rustled once more and the island at last completely disappeared from view. Behind Giovanni was a tall Catholic-like nun wearing a black veil. He had no idea when she had boarded the train. Her round green eyes were cast down, staring straight in front of her and she seemed to be listening reverently to something, words or a voice, that reached her from afar. The other travelers quietly resumed their seats while the two boys spoke softly together, communicat-

ing the new feeling, which resembled sadness, that filled their hearts but with words that were somehow changed from before.

"We'll be at Cygnus Station soon."

"Right, we'll arrive at exactly eleven."

Almost immediately a green signal light on a hazy white pole flickered past. Then a lamp marking a railway switch, dark and dim as a sulfur flame, slid past below the window. The train slowed and before long a row of beautifully regular platform lights appeared. These gradually grew larger and more spread out until the two boys came to a stop in front of the big clock of the Cygnus Station.

On the crisp autumnal face of the clock the two needles, tempered to a blue sheen, pointed exactly to eleven. Everyone immediately got off and the carriage was completely empty.

"Twenty Minute Stop," read a sign beneath the clock.

"Why don't we get off too?" Giovanni suggested.

"Yes, let's."

The two boys jumped up together, leapt out of the door, and raced off in the direction of the ticket gate. At the ticket gate, however, they discovered only a single, somewhat purplish, electric light burning brightly; no one was there. Looking around, they could find no trace of anyone resembling a station master or porter.

The two came out onto a little plaza in front of the station. It seemed to be made from pieces of crystal and was ringed by ginkgo trees. From it a broad avenue headed straight out through the bluish shimmer of the Milky Way.

The boys had no idea where the people who had gotten off the train ahead of them had gone. There was no one around. As they walked side by side along the white road, their shadows radiated from them in all directions exactly like the shadows of two pillars in a room with windows on all four sides or like the spokes of two wheels. Before long they arrived at the pretty river bed they had seen from the train.





Campanella spread out a pinch of the beautiful sand in the palm of his hand. Rubbing it with his finger so that the grains grated gently against each other, he said dreamily, "The grains of sand are all crystal. There are little fires burning inside."

"That's true," replied Giovanni, caught up in his own thoughts. He had the feeling he had learned about the sand somewhere.

All the pebbles along the river bed were translucent. There were clearly pieces of crystal and topaz among them. Some showed complex patterns of folds and swirls while others, diamond-bright, released a pale light like mist where two facets met. Giovanni ran to the river's edge and plunged in his hand. The uncanny water of the Milky Way's silver river was more transparent than hydrogen, but, clearly, it was flowing. This could be told from the way the two boys' wrists seemed to float with a faint tinge of mercury where they were submerged in the water, and from the way the ripples that formed where the water flowed against their wrists seemed to flicker and burn with a beautiful phosphorescent light.

Upstream, beneath a cliff covered with pampas grass, they could see a white rock as flat as a playing field alongside the river. On it were five or six small figures, some standing, some crouching down. The figures had some sort of tools that now and again flashed in the sun; it looked as though they were digging something up or else burying something.

"Let's go have a look," the two boys both shouted at the same moment, and they raced off in the direction of the figures. At the entrance to the area of white rock was a shiny ceramic signboard that read, "The Pliocene Coast." Beyond the entrance, here and there along the river's edge, someone had erected railings made of slender iron poles and set out pretty wooden benches.

"There's something strange here!"

Campanella stopped in surprise and picked up from the rock a

walnut-like object, long and slender with a pointed tip.

"It's a walnut! Look, they're lots of them! They didn't just wash up here; they're embedded in the rock."

"They're big, twice the size of normal walnuts. This one's not the least bit broken."

"Come on, let's have a look over there. I bet they're digging something up."

Clutching their black, jagged-edged walnuts, they headed toward the spot. On their left the waves burned with a sort of gentle lightning as they lapped the shore, while on their right the ears of the pampas grass, looking as though they were made of silver and sea shells, rustled on the cliff.

As they drew nearer they could see a tall, academic-looking man with very thick glasses and black boots, busy jotting something down in his notebook while at the same time frantically issuing orders to three people who, using picks and trowels, appeared to be his assistants.

"Careful not to damage that projection there! Use the trowel, I said, the trowel! Stop! Dig from further back! No, no, no! Why must you be so rough?"

The boys looked and saw an enormous pale-colored animal bone that seemed to have fallen over on its side and broken. It was more than half dug out from the soft white rock around it. Then they noticed that some of the stone that bore the footprints of cloven-hoofed animals had been neatly cut out into ten square pieces with a number attached to each piece.

The professorial gentleman turned toward the boys, his glasses flashing. "You've come to observe, I take it," he said. "I expect you saw lots of walnuts. Those are roughly one million two hundred thousand years old. Very recent as these things go. One million two hundred thousand years ago, in the latter part of the Tertiary period, this area was a beach. Deeper down you can find sea shells. Right where the river flows now there used to be salt





water washing in and out. Now, this animal here is called a bos—Hey, stop using a pick there! Do it carefully with a chisel!—Well, this bos animal was the ancestor of today's cow. In former times they were very numerous.”

“Will it be used as a specimen?”

“No, we need it as proof. To you and me this area is a fine thick stratum of earth and there is all sorts of evidence turning up to show it was formed one million two hundred thousand years ago. But to people different from ourselves does it really appear like this as a stratum of earth? Or does it seem to be wind or perhaps water or even empty sky? That's the point. Are you following me? Nevertheless—Hey, you can't use a trowel there! Don't you know there might be a rib bone buried just underneath?”

The professor rushed off in alarm.

“It's late,” said Campanella, glancing from his map to his watch. “We'd better go.”

“Well then, sir, we have to be going.” Giovanni took polite leave of the professor.

“I see, off you go then.”

The professor once again began to walk busily about, supervising. The two boys raced off over the white rock at top speed in order not to be late for the train. They found that they could truly run like the wind. They did not grow short of breath and their knees did not get hot and sore. Giovanni thought that if they could run like this, they could gallop all over the world.

They returned along the river. The light at the ticket gate gradually grew larger. Before long they were both back in their old seats on the train, gazing out the window at the place they had just visited.

8

The Bird Catcher

“Mind if I sit here?”

From behind them came a gruff but kindly adult voice. It belonged to a man with a red beard and a stooped back who wore a slightly tattered brown overcoat. Two bundles wrapped in white cloth were slung over his shoulder.

“All right.”

Giovanni simply bunched his shoulders a bit by way of a nod of greeting. The man smiled softly through his beard and carefully placed his bundles on the net baggage rack. Giovanni, feeling somehow very sad and lonely, gazed in silence at the clock directly before him. Far ahead a glassy whistle blew. The train was already moving quietly. Campanella’s gaze wandered over the top of the carriage. A black beetle had landed on one of the lights and was casting a large shadow across the ceiling. The man with the red beard was watching Giovanni and Campanella, for some reason he was smiling tenderly. The train had gradually gathered speed; pampas grass and river flashed in turn outside the window.

“Where might you be heading?” the man asked the two boys a little timidly.

Giovanni felt somewhat at a loss for an answer.

“We’re going on and on forever.”

“That’s nice. This train really does go on forever.”

“Where are you going?” Campanella suddenly asked, in such a challenging tone that Giovanni laughed without thinking. A man in a pointed hat with a huge key hanging at his waist, who was sitting in the seat opposite, glanced in their direction and also laughed. That made Campanella, too, turn red in the face and burst out laughing in spite of himself.

The man with the red beard, however, did not seem particularly offended. With his cheeks twitching a little nervously, he replied, “I’ll be getting off just ahead. I’m in the bird-catching business.”

“What birds do you catch?”

“Cranes and wild geese. Herons and swans too.”

“Are there lots of cranes?”

“Oh yes. They’ve been calling for a while now. Didn’t you hear them?”

“No.”

“Can’t you hear them even now? There, listen carefully.”

The two boys looked up, straining their ears to hear. Between the rumbling of the train and the noise of the wind in the pampas grass came a sound like bubbling water.

“How do you catch cranes?”

“Do you mean cranes or herons?”

“Herons,” replied Giovanni, thinking really either would do. “They’re no trouble, herons. You see, they’re all made from the Milky Way river sand when it lumps together and goes ‘poof,’ and so they’re always coming back to the river. So I wait on the river bed when they come down with their legs out like this, see, and I catch ’em just before they reach the ground. Then the herons, they sort of set like that and die with quiet hearts. And after that, well, everybody knows what happens—I press them like leaves.”

"'You press herons like leaves? As specimens?'"

"'Not as specimens. Why, people eat them, of course.'"

"'How strange,'" said Campanella, surprised.

"'There's nothing strange or mysterious about it. Look!'"

The man stood, took down the bundles from the baggage rack, and unwrapped one, turning it around and around with a practiced hand.

"'There, have a look. I only just now caught them.'"

"'They really are herons!'" the two boys could not help exclaiming.

There were ten herons, pure white and shining like the northern cross they had seen just a while ago. The herons were in a row like a bas-relief with their bodies a little flattened and their black legs drawn up.

"'Their eyes are closed.'"

Campanella gently touched the closed eye of a heron with his finger. It was white and crescent-shaped. Even the snowy lance-like feathers on the top of the head were still firmly attached.

"'Yes, they are shut, aren't they?'"

The man folded over the cloth and wrapped up the bundle again, around and around, and fastened it with a cord.

Wondering in their present locale what sort of person actually ate heron, Giovanni asked, "'Does heron taste good?'"

"'Yes. Every day I get orders. But wild goose sells even better. That's because wild goose is higher quality, and, most important, there's no fuss. Here you go.'"

The bird catcher unwrapped the other bundle. There were wild geese marbled with patches of yellow and pale blue. They shone like lamps. Just like the heron, they were arranged in a row, a little flattened and with their bills in a tidy line.

"'These you can eat as is. Have some, please.'"

The bird catcher tugged gently at a yellow goose foot. At once it broke off neatly as though it were made of chocolate.

“Go ahead and taste a little.” The bird catcher snapped it in two and handed a piece to each boy.

Giovanni took a small bite.

—It really is candy. It's even better than chocolate. But how could this goose ever have flown around? I bet this man is a candymaker from somewhere in the countryside around here. Still, I feel pretty rotten making fun of the fellow when I eat his candy.—

While these thoughts were running through his mind, Giovanni was greedily eating his piece.

“Have a little more, please.” The bird catcher again took out his bundle.

Giovanni wanted to have some more, but he held back and said, “No thanks.”

The bird catcher then offered it to the man with the key in the opposite seat.

“Sorry to be taking goods you need for business.” The man removed his hat.

“Oh, don't mention it. Well, what's your thought? Are the migratory birds doing well this year?”

“My word, yes! The day before yesterday about the second watch there were telephone calls from all over asking, what was the matter, why had I made the lighthouse light all irregular? But, good heavens, I wasn't doing it. Those migratory birds were flocking together so thick they looked like pitch and flying in front of the light. Why there was nothing to be done about it. I told the people, you idiots, it doesn't do any good coming to me with your complaints. Tell them to that general with the rustling cape and ridiculous long skinny legs and mouth. Ha, ha!”

The pampas grass gone, light suddenly shone toward them from across the fields.

“Why are the herons more trouble?” Campanella had been wanting to ask his question for some time.

The bird catcher turned to face them. "Well, in order to eat heron, you've got to hang it in the water-light of the Milky Way's silver river for a whole ten days. That, or else bury it in the sand for three or four days. When you do that, the mercury all evaporates and you can eat it."

"This isn't a bird. Surely it's just candy?"

It seemed that Campanella had been thinking along the same lines as Giovanni. He had clearly made up his mind to come out with the question. The bird catcher, for his part, jumped up in a great hurry and, announcing that he really had to be getting off, picked up his bundles and disappeared.

"Where did he go?"

The two boys looked at one another. Then the lighthouse keeper, grinning broadly, stood up from his seat a little and peered out of the window on the boys' side. Following his gaze, the two boys saw the bird catcher standing on the cottonweed that grew everywhere along the river's side, emitting a beautiful yellow and pale-blue phosphorescent light. With arms outspread, he was staring at the sky with an intent expression on his face.

"He's over there. A strange sight, isn't he? He's just about to catch some more birds. Let's hope the birds come quickly before the train leaves him behind."

The lighthouse keeper had no sooner finished speaking than herons, like the ones the boys had just seen, came fluttering down as thick and fast as snow from the empty sky the color of bell-flowers. They cried as they came. The bird catcher, beaming with satisfaction at the way the birds had come virtually on command, stood with his legs spread at an exact sixty-degree angle. Using both hands, he caught the herons one after another by their black feet, drawn up for a landing, and stuffed them into a cloth sack. For a while the herons were like fireflies flickering on and off with a bluish light inside the sack. But in the end they all finally turned to a soft white and closed their eyes. More numerous than





the birds that were caught, however, were the ones that were not caught and that descended safely to the sands of the Milky Way. Just as snow melts, these birds collapsed and flattened out the instant their feet touched the sand, until soon they were spread out over the sand and gravel like bird-shaped pools of molten copper fresh from the smelting furnace. For a while the bird shape remained, but this too, after glowing and fading two or three times, by turn soon became utterly indistinguishable from the surrounding sand.

When he had put a good twenty birds into his sack, the bird catcher suddenly raised his hands into the air, looking like a soldier hit by a fatal bullet. At that instant, the figure of the bird catcher disappeared from the spot and beside him Giovanni heard a familiar voice. "How refreshing! Really, there's nothing like doing just enough work to feel good." He turned and saw the bird catcher neatly arranging the herons he had just caught, restacking them one by one.

"How did you come here all at once from over there?" Giovanni asked with an odd feeling, not knowing whether to think it normal or not.

"You want to know *how*? Why, because I wished to come, I came. . . . And where exactly might you folks be from?"

Giovanni intended to reply right away but, try as he might, he could no longer recall where in fact he had come from. Campanella, his face blushing red, looked as though he too were making an effort to remember something.

"Ah, you come from far away, don't you?"

The bird catcher simply nodded as though he understood.

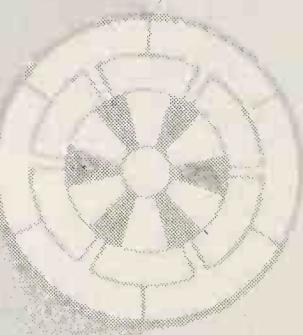
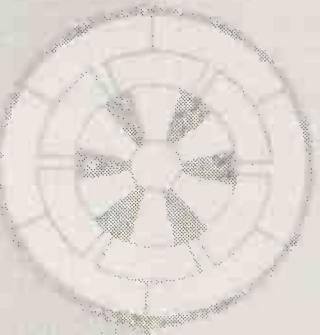
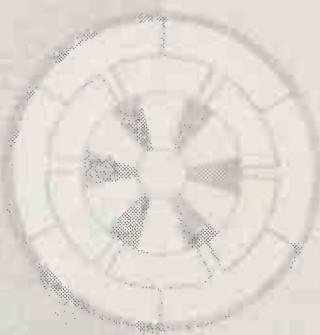
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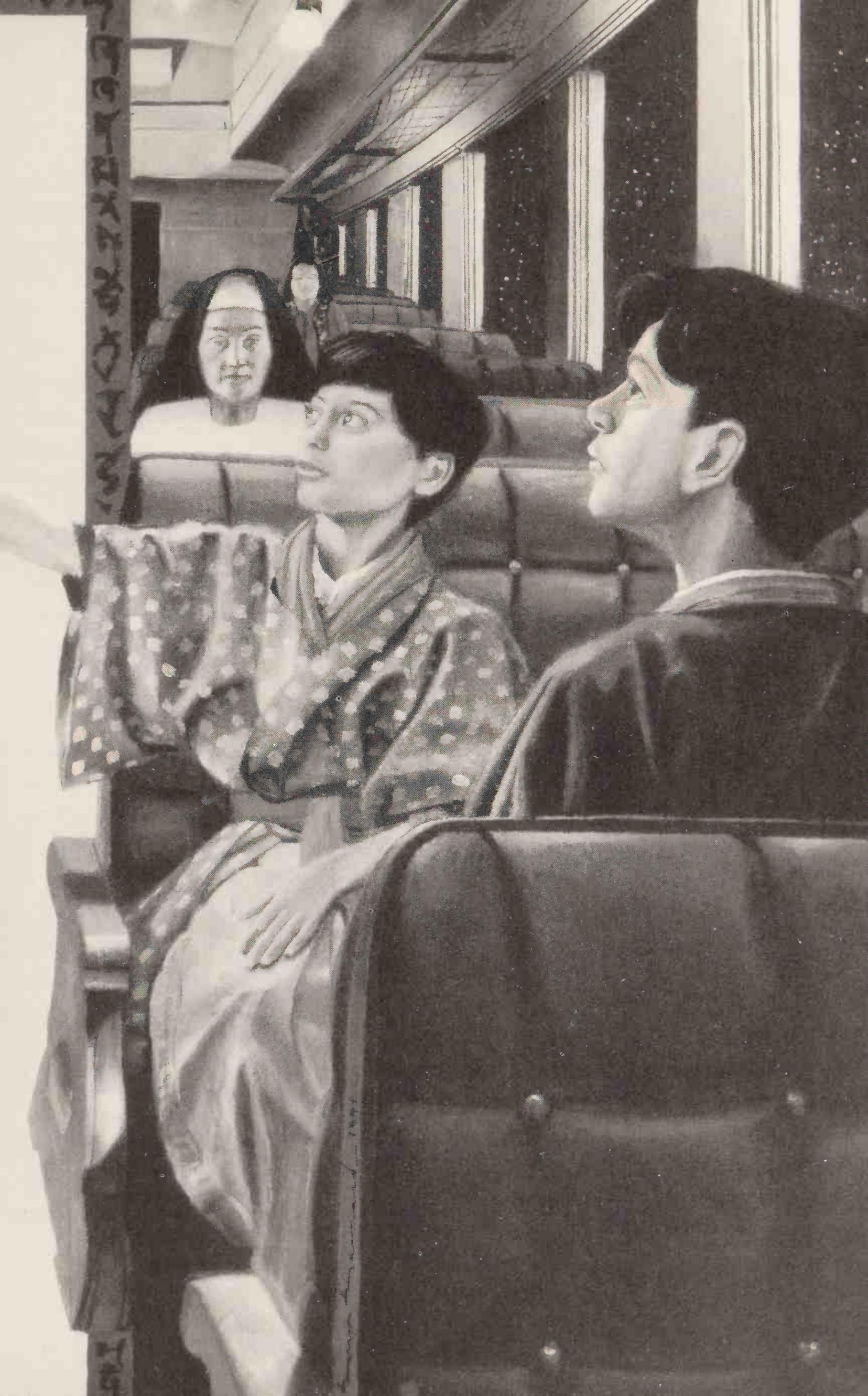
Giovanni's Ticket

"We've leaving Cygnus District now. If you look you can see the famous observatory of Albireo."

The river of heaven outside the train window seemed filled with sparklers. In its middle stood four large black buildings. On the flat roof of one, two big dazzling translucent globes, one of topaz, the other of sapphire, were turning in a slow circle. Gradually, the yellow globe swung around to the back of the circle while the smaller blue one came forward. Presently, their two edges overlapped to form what looked like a lovely green double-sided convex lens. This, too, gradually swelled at the center until, finally, the blue globe had come directly in front of the topaz one to form a green center encircled by a bright yellow ring. This green circle kept moving off to the side until the lens figure was repeated on the other edge of the topaz globe. Eventually, the two globes separated completely. The sapphire one circled around to the back while the yellow one came forward and the pattern was repeated. Surrounded by the formless, soundless water of the silver river, the black buildings of the weather observatory lay peacefully stretched out exactly as though they were asleep.

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"That's a device for measuring the water's speed. You see, the water too. . . ." No sooner had the bird catcher started to speak when—

"Ticket inspection!"

Suddenly a tall conductor in a red hat appeared, standing stiff and straight beside their seats. Without saying a word, the bird catcher produced a slip of paper from his pocket. The conductor glanced at it briefly and then thrust out his hand toward Giovanni and Campanella, wiggling his fingers as though to say, "And what about you two?"

While Giovanni hesitated, not knowing what to do, Campanella nonchalantly handed over a small gray ticket. Giovanni, utterly flustered, stuck his hand in his jacket pocket with the thought that a ticket might possibly be in there and found what felt like a large folded piece of paper. Surprised by his discovery, he quickly pulled it out. It was a green piece of paper, about the size of a postcard, folded in four. Since the conductor had his hand out, Giovanni decided he might just as well hand this paper to him. The conductor stood very straight and unfolded the paper carefully. Then, as he read it, he kept fidgeting about straightening the buttons on his jacket. The lighthouse keeper, too, peered up at the paper and studied it intently, so Giovanni thought it must be a certificate of some sort and he felt his chest growing a little warm.

"Did you bring this from three-dimensional space, Sir?" the conductor inquired.

"I really don't know anything about it."

Relieved that everything was all right now, Giovanni looked up at the conductor and gave a little laugh.

"Very good, Sir. We'll be arriving at the Southern Cross at the third hour following, Sir."

The conductor handed the paper back to Giovanni and went off.

Campanella instantly stole a glance at the slip of paper, clearly on fire to find out what it was. Giovanni, too, was eager to have a look. It proved, however, to be ten strange characters printed in the middle of a black arabesque design. As they stared at the paper in silence, they had the feeling that somehow they were being sucked up into the middle of it.

"My, this is very valuable. What you have here is a ticket that even lets you go to the real heaven. Not just heaven, this is a pass that lets you walk freely wherever you like. Why, if you have this you ought to be able to go anywhere at all on the likes of this Milky Way Railway of the imperfect, illusory fourth dimension. You're pretty important, aren't you?"

"I really don't know anything about it." Giovanni blushed as he refolded the paper and put it back in his pocket. Feeling embarrassed, he turned to gaze out of the window once more with Campanella, but he was vaguely aware that the bird catcher kept darting occasional glances in his direction as though he, Giovanni, were somebody special.

"Aquila Station's coming up soon," announced Campanella as he checked the three small, bluish-white triangular markers lined up along the far bank against his map.

For some reason—he did not know why—Giovanni began to feel unbearably sorry for the bird catcher sitting next to him. When he considered one by one the things the bird catcher had done—how he had taken pleasure at his own zest in catching herons, how he had wrapped the herons up around and around in the white cloth, how he had taken a surprised sideways look at Giovanni's ticket and then started praising him excitedly—when he thought about these things, Giovanni felt he wanted to give this bird catcher, whom he had never seen before, something, some one of his possessions, or some food, anything. He felt that if it would mean this man's true happiness, then he himself would not mind standing on the shining bed of the heavenly river

and catching birds on his behalf for a hundred years on end. He had to say something. He was about to ask the bird catcher what he desired most, but thought that might seem too abrupt. Wondering what would be the best thing to do, he glanced behind him, only to find that the bird catcher was no longer there. The white bundles were missing from the baggage rack as well. He quickly glanced out of the window, thinking he might spot him with legs spread, staring up at the sky, poised to catch more herons. But outside was all beautiful sand and waves of white pampas grass; the bird catcher's broad back and pointed hat were nowhere to be seen.

"I wonder where that man went?" Campanella said softly. He, too, had clearly been thinking about him.

"Where did he go? When will we ever see him again? Why didn't I talk with him more than I did?"

"I was just wondering the same thing."

"I just considered him a nuisance. I feel awful about it." Giovanni thought he had never before felt this peculiar sort of emotion, nor said this sort of thing.

"Somehow I smell apples. I wonder if that's because I was thinking of apples just now?" Puzzled, Campanella glanced around the carriage.

"There really is a smell of apples. And of wild roses, too." Giovanni also glanced around, but the smells seemed to be coming in through the window. He thought that since it was autumn, it was odd to have the smell of wild roses in bloom.

Then, suddenly, there was a boy of about six with glossy black hair standing in the carriage. The buttons of his red jacket were undone, and he was barefoot and shivering with a very startled expression on his face. Beside him was a tall young man neatly dressed in a black suit. Grasping the hand of the little boy very firmly, the young man stood like a strong tree meeting the full force of the wind.

"Where are we? How lovely it is!"

A pretty girl of about twelve, with brown eyes and wearing a black overcoat, was behind the young man, clinging to his arm. She was gazing in astonishment out of the window.

"We're in Lancashire. No, Connecticut. No, I see, we've come to the sky. We're going to heaven. Look, that sign there is the sign for heaven! There is nothing to be afraid of now. We are being called by God."

The young man in the black suit announced this to the girl, his face glowing with joy. But for some reason, lines of worry soon reappeared on his forehead. Looking utterly exhausted, he made an effort to smile as he sat the little boy down next to Giovanni.

He then gently motioned to the girl to take the seat next to Campanella. She obeyed, folding her hands neatly in her lap.

"I'm going where my big sister is." Looking as though he were about to cry, the recently seated little boy spoke to the young man, who himself had just taken a seat opposite the light-house keeper. The young man's face took on an indescribably sad expression as he gazed at the curly, wet head of the child. The girl suddenly put her hands to her face and quietly began to cry.

"There are all sorts of tasks remaining for your father and sister, Kikuyo, to do. But they will come in just a little while. Think instead of how long your mother has been waiting for you. She really is worrying about you and waiting for you thinking, what song is my little Tadashi singing now, is he holding hands with the others and circling round the elderberry bush playing on a snowy morning? So let's go quickly and see your mother, shall we?"

"All right, but I wish I hadn't gone on the ship."

"Yes, but look over there. See, that wonderful river there is what you used to see through the window all white and hazy that summer when we sang 'Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star' every night before

bed. It's right over there. Pretty isn't it, the way it shines?"

Even the boy's sister, who had been crying, wiped her eyes with a handkerchief and looked out.

In a quiet, teacherly voice, the young man again spoke to the children. "We have nothing to be sad about now. We are traveling through such a nice place and will soon go to where God is. It will be very bright there and smell lovely and be full of wonderful people. And the people who were able to board the lifeboats instead of us will all be rescued. I'm sure of it. They will each go to their own homes and to their fathers and mothers who are waiting and worrying about them. So, since we haven't long to go, let's cheer up and sing some songs to make the time go faster."

As the young man comforted the two children, stroking the boy's wet black hair, his own face gradually brightened.

"Where did you folks come from? What happened to you?" the lighthouse keeper asked the young man, in a way that showed he had managed to figure out something about their situation.

The young man smiled softly, and said, "Our ship hit an iceberg and sank. Their father had returned to his country ahead of his family on account of some urgent business and we had started out to join him two months later. I was a university student and employed as a private tutor. On the twelfth day out, I don't know whether it was today or yesterday, the ship hit an iceberg and at once listed badly and started to sink. There was some hazy moonlight but the mist was very thick. Half of the lifeboats on the port side were already beyond use so there was no way that everyone could board. The ship was going to sink at any moment and I became desperate crying out to please let these little ones on. The people nearby immediately opened up a path for us and began to pray for the children. But the space between us and the lifeboats was crowded with little children and their parents, and I

didn't have the heart to push them aside. Then I thought that even though I didn't want to, it was my duty to do all I could to save these two young people, and I was about to shove aside the children in front of us. I thought about it again, however, and decided that rather than be saved in such a manner, it would be these young people's true happiness for us all to go as we were before God. After that I changed my mind again and thought I would bear the sin against God on my own shoulders and make every effort to save them. When I saw what was happening, however, I could not bring myself to do it. They put only the children in the lifeboats while the mothers frantically blew kisses and the fathers stood with straight backs stoically bearing their grief. It tore my heart to watch.

"Meanwhile, the ship was sinking fast, so I prepared myself mentally. Putting my arms around these two, I waited with them for the ship to sink, thinking we would try to stay afloat as long as we could. Someone tossed out a life preserver but it flew past us and slid off somewhere. With great effort I managed to pry loose some grating from the deck and we all three grasped it tightly. Seemingly out of nowhere, a voice rose singing a hymn. At once, everyone joined in together singing in different languages. At that moment there was a sudden loud noise and we fell into the water. Thinking we had already been drawn into the whirlpool, I held onto these two tightly and then, when everything went dim, I found myself here. These young people lost their mother the year before last. Oh, I'm certain the lifeboats escaped all right. Because the sailors were quite practiced, you see, and rowed away quickly from the ship."

From a distance they could hear small voices raised in prayer. Giovanni and Campanella recalled all sorts of vague memories they had long forgotten and their eyes grew warm.

—That big ocean is the Pacific, isn't it? In small boats in that iceberg-dotted sea in the far north, people are working, strug-

gling for all they're worth, as they battle the wind and the freezing saltwater and the fierce cold. I feel truly sorry for those people and also, somehow, apologetic before them. I wonder what I can possibly do for the sake of their happiness?—

Giovanni sat with head bent, utterly dejected.

"We don't know what happiness is," the lighthouse keeper spoke consolingly. "In truth, any hardship at all, if it's experienced along the way of righteousness, is just a step bringing us closer to true happiness; both the climb up the pass and the climb down bring us closer."

"That's true." The young man made a prayerful response. "If it is for the sake of attaining the supreme happiness, tragedy, too, in all sorts of forms can be the divine will."

Exhausted, the brother and sister were both slumped down in their seats fast asleep. On their feet, barefoot before, they now wore soft white shoes.

With a clickity-clack the train sped along the bank of the glittering, phosphorescent river. On the opposite side of the train from the river the fields were like a magic lantern show. There were hundreds and thousands of triangular markers, large and small, of various sorts. Above the larger ones could be seen surveyors' flags dotted with red. So many were clustered all over the far end of the fields that they were like a soft, pale white mist. From there, or perhaps from further away, what looked like hazy beacon fires in various shapes shot up from time to time, first one, then the other, into the deep purple sky. The beautiful transparent wind was indeed filled with the scent of wild roses.

"Well, how do you like 'em? I bet you've never seen apples like this before."

The lighthouse keeper opposite sat with apples on his lap, cradling them with both hands so that they would not fall. They were huge and beautifully tinted with gold and crimson.

Looking truly astonished, the young man bent over the pile of

apples held by the lighthouse keeper. Narrowing his eyes and cocking his head, he stared at them in complete absorption. "Wow, they're magnificent! Do apples grow like that around here?"

"Take one, please, take one."

The young man took an apple, then glanced toward Giovanni and Campanella.

"And what about you little gentlemen over there? Won't you have some, too?"

Giovanni felt somewhat offended at being called a little gentleman and remained silent, but Campanella said, "Thank you."

Since the young man then went ahead and selected an apple apiece for each of them and handed them over, Giovanni stood up and said thank you as well.

Now that his arms were free, the lighthouse keeper himself gently placed an apple on the lap of both the sleeping brother and his sister.

"Thank you very much," said the young man, still gazing intently at the fruit. "Where do they grow such magnificent apples?"

"Of course, we practice agriculture in these parts, but there is a promise that by and large good things will just grow on their own accord. Agriculture itself doesn't take such a lot of effort. Usually if you just sow the seeds you want, the crops grow quickly by themselves. Even the rice is huskless, like rice in the Pacific area, and the grains are ten times bigger than normal and have a good smell. But where you folks are headed there isn't any more agriculture. Even cakes and apples don't have any residue when you eat them but are wafted off as delicate fragrances through the pores of the skin. The fragrance is different for each person."

Suddenly the little boy opened his eyes wide and said, "I was just dreaming of my mother. She was in a place with lots of big fancy cupboards and books. She looked at me and held out her

hands and smiled and smiled and smiled. I told her I was going to find an apple and bring it to her, and then I woke up. This must be the train I was on before."

"The apple is right here," the young man said. "This nice man gave it to you."

"Thank you. But my sister, Kaoru, is still asleep. I'll wake her up. Kaoru, look, you have an apple. Wake up."

His sister smiled and opened her eyes. Dazzled by the light, she put her hands over her eyes for a moment, then looked at her apple. Her brother was already eating his, savoring it as though it were a piece of pie. And the pretty skin, which had been carefully peeled, wound around and around in a corkscrew shape. Before it could fall to the floor, the peel evaporated in a soft gray gleam of light.

Giovanni and Campanella both put their apples carefully away in their pockets.

Downstream on the opposite bank a woods came into view. It was large and densely grown and the branches of its trees were laden with ripe, round fruit gleaming crimson. In the very center of the woods stood an enormously tall triangular marker. From the midst of the forest a sound of inexpressibly beautiful tonal quality, blended with the orchestral bell and xylophone, came flowing toward them, half-melting, half-seeping into the wind.

The young man shuddered, his whole body trembling.

As they listened in silence to the music, shining fields—or perhaps they were carpets—of yellow and palest green spread out everywhere before them, while a dew like a pure white wax seemed to film over the face of the sun.

"My, look at those crows," exclaimed the girl called Kaoru, who was sitting beside Campanella.

"They're not crows, they're magpies, all of them!" Campanella had again assumed an inadvertently critical tone so that Giovanni once more laughed without thinking. The girl looked embar-

rassed. On the palely shining river bed, dozens upon dozens of black birds rested in a dense line, quietly basking in the soft gleam from the river.

The young man spoke, trying to smooth things over. "They are indeed magpies. See how the feathers stick straight out from the back of the head."

The train came abreast of the triangular marker that stood in the forest on the opposite bank. At that moment they could hear strains of a familiar hymn coming from the very back of the train. It sounded as though a fairly large chorus were singing. The young man instantly paled, stood up, and seemed about to rush off in the direction of the singing, but then changed his mind and sat down again. Kaoru pressed a handkerchief to her face. Even Giovanni felt his nose acting a little strange. Almost imperceptibly, however, the chorus swelled, gradually becoming louder and clearer until both Giovanni and Campanella automatically joined in.

Then the green forest of olives, tearfully shimmering on the far bank of the invisible river of heaven, slowly slipped behind them. The strange instrumental sounds that flowed toward them from the woods were worn away by the clatter of the train and the noise of the wind until they could barely be heard.

"Peacocks!"

"Yes," responded the girl. "There were lots of them."

Above the forest, which was now no bigger than a green shell button, Giovanni saw from time to time the sudden flashing reflection of pale blue light as the peacocks alternately spread and closed their tails.

"I could even hear the cries of the peacocks earlier," Campanella said to Kaoru.

"Yes," said the girl. "There were about thirty of them, I'm sure of it. When it sounded like a lyre, that was the peacocks calling."

Suddenly, Giovanni felt terribly sad, so much so that he was half-ready to urge Campanella with a fierce look to jump from the train with him and go off to have fun.

The river forked. On the pitch-black island in the middle of the fork a very tall watchtower had been constructed. A man dressed in baggy clothes and wearing a red cap stood on the top of the tower. Holding a red and a green flag in either hand, he was looking up at the sky and signaling. As Giovanni watched, the man waved the red flag repeatedly, then, suddenly, he lowered the red flag and, hiding it behind his back, lifted the green one very high. Looking like an orchestra conductor with his baton, he waved the flag furiously. At that moment there was a noise like rain throughout the sky and lump after lump of some inky-black substance went flying like bullets toward the far bank of the river. Instantly, Giovanni thrust his body halfway out the train window and gazed up at the scene. Across the bottom of the beautiful empty sky the color of bellflowers flew tens of thousands of small birds in flock after flock, each bird calling busily.

"There are birds flying," said Giovanni from outside the window.

"Wow!" Campanella, too, looked at the sky.

Just then, the man in baggy clothes at the top of the tower suddenly raised the red flag and waved it frantically. Abruptly, the flocks of birds stopped crossing while at the same time, from further downstream, came the sound of something going splat. This was followed by silence. No sooner were they aware of the silence than the signalman again waved his green flag and shouted.

"Now pass, you birds of passage! Now pass, you birds of passage!"

They could hear his voice quite clearly. Once again, flocks of tens of thousands of birds streaked across the sky. The girl stuck her face out of the middle window between the two boys and, with her pretty cheeks shining, looked up at the sky.

"My, what a lot of birds there are! How pretty the sky is!"

She spoke to Giovanni but Giovanni found her unpleasantly forward and kept silent. With his mouth firmly shut, he gazed up at the sky. The girl breathed a little sigh and silently returned to her seat. Campanella, apparently feeling sorry for her, brought his head in and looked at his map.

"Do you suppose the man is teaching the birds?" the girl quietly inquired of Campanella.

"He's signaling to the birds," Campanella replied, a little uncertainly. "I bet it's because there are some beacon fires being lit somewhere."

A hush settled over the carriage. Giovanni wanted to pull his head in but he would have found it painful to show his face in such a brightly lighted place and he resisted the urge in silence. Still standing as he was, he began to whistle.

—I wonder why I'm so sad like this, he thought. I really should have a kinder, more tolerant attitude. Way beyond the river bank over there I can see a small bluish flame, pale as smoke. It's so cold and still. I'll keep looking at that and calm myself down.—

Pressing both his hands to his hot, aching head, Giovanni turned his gaze toward the distant flame.

—Isn't there anyone who will go on and on with me forever? Even Campanella's all wrapped up in talking to that girl. What about me?—

Giovanni's eyes again filled with tears. The Milky Way river seemed merely hazy white as though it had grown very distant.

At that point the train gradually left the river and began to run along the top of a cliff. On the opposite bank as well, a black cliff rose steadily higher and higher as it followed the river downstream. Some large cornstalks flashed past the window. The edges of the leaves were richly curling and below them the large green ears already spouted red silk, providing a glimpse of pearly kernels. The cornstalks gradually increased in number until they

formed a row between the railroad tracks and the cliff. When Giovanni, following an impulse, drew in his head and looked out the window on the other side of the carriage, he found the lovely fields of the sky planted to the far horizon with the large rustling cornstalks. Drops of dew, just like diamonds drenched in noon-day sun, clung in profusion to the tips of the wonderful rippling leaves and shone, flashing red and green.

“That’s corn, isn’t it?” Campanella asked Giovanni, but since Giovanni was still in a black mood, he only answered curtly, “Yes,” and continued to look out the window.

Then the train began to slow gradually. After passing several signals and lamps marking switches, it came to a stop at a small station.

The pale face of the station clock stood directly before them, its hands pointing exactly to the second hour. In the middle of the fields, utterly hushed now that the wind had died down and the train was no longer moving, the pendulum went on swinging, tick-tock, tick-tock, precisely counting the time.

Then, exactly in the intervals between the pendulum’s tick and tock, a melody came toward them, flowing like a silk thread from the farthest limit of the fields. “It’s the New World Symphony,” the girl said softly to herself as she glanced at the two boys. Everyone in the carriage, including the tall young man in his dark suit, seemed lost in some sweet dream.

—In such a nice, quiet place why can’t I feel happier? Why do I feel so lonely? But Campanella is being really awful, spending all his time talking to that girl when he’s riding on the train with me. It makes me feel terrible.—

Giovanni stared out of the far window with his face half-hidden in his hands. A transparent, glassy whistle sounded and the train began quietly to move. Campanella whistled a lonely-sounding version of the star song.

"Yes, yes, it's because this area is an enormously high plateau."

From behind them came a voice that seemed to belong to an elderly man. He spoke in a clear, crisp manner as though just recently awakened. "Even with corn you have to dig a hole with a stick two feet deep and sow the seed in there or it won't grow."

"You don't say. It must be quite some distance to the river."

"Yes indeed, the river is anywhere from two thousand to six thousand feet down. It's already a gigantic canyon."

Giovanni suddenly thought to himself that they might be on the Colorado plateau. Campanella was still whistling sadly to himself, and the girl, her cheeks the color of apples swathed in silk, was looking out in the same direction as Giovanni. Suddenly the corn disappeared and there were vast cleared fields of rich black everywhere. The "New World Symphony" welled up more and more clearly from the horizon. Across the black fields a lone Indian, the feather of a white bird in his hair, his arms and chest decorated with many stones, and an arrow fitted to his small bow, raced after the train at top speed.

"It's an Indian! Look, an Indian!"

Even the young man in the dark suit opened his eyes. Both Giovanni and Campanella stood up.

"He's running this way! He's running this way! Oh, he must be chasing after the train!"

"No, he's not chasing after the train," the young man spoke, standing with his hands in his pockets, oblivious to all but the Indian. "He's hunting. Or dancing."

The Indian did seem to be half-dancing. If he had been running, he would have bent each step more to the effort and been more in earnest. Suddenly the striking white feather on his head fell forward and he came to an abrupt halt. Swiftly he drew his bow, aiming toward the sky. Once again he set off at a run as a single crane came fluttering down. The crane fell neatly into his

outstretched arms. The Indian then stood, smiling happily. As he held the crane and gazed after the train, his figure quickly grew smaller and more distant. The insulators of telegraph poles twinkled past. They flashed brightly twice and the fields turned into a forest of corn once again. Looking out the near window, Giovanni found that the train was indeed running along the top of a very high cliff. At the bottom of the valley the river flowed broad and shining.

The elderly voice they had heard before spoke again. "Yes, we start going downhill about here. We've got a single run now right down to the level of the river, you see, so it's no simple matter. Because of the steep grade, trains never come from the opposite direction. There now, we've already gathered speed, haven't we?"

The train sped downhill. Where the railroad ran along the cliff's edge, they could glimpse the river shining below. Giovanni's mood gradually brightened. Sometimes he gave a startled cry, as he did when the train passed a little hut outside of which he saw a child standing dejectedly, looking in his direction.

The train raced along. The people in the carriage, thrown backward until they were half-prone, clung tightly to their seats. Giovanni suddenly burst out laughing along with Campanella. Then the river of heaven was flowing there beside the train, glittering from time to time as though it were moving with more force than before. Here and there along the river bed, soft red wild carnations were blooming. The train ran more slowly, as though it had finally settled down.

On both banks stood flags marked with the shapes of stars and picks.

Giovanni spoke at last. "What sort of flags do you suppose those are?"

"I don't know. They're not on my map. They've got metal boats out there, haven't they?"

"Right."

"I wonder if they aren't building a bridge here?" said the girl.

"Yes. Those must be the flags of the army engineers. They're doing bridge-building maneuvers. But I don't see any sign of a soldier."

At that moment, near the opposite bank and a little downstream, the invisible water of the Milky Way river shot flashing in a column high into the air. There was an enormous boom.

"They're blasting! They're blasting!"

Campanella jumped with excitement.

The column of water disappeared. Big salmon and trout were hurled into the air, their bellies glittering white, then, describing an arc, they fell back into the water again. Giovanni's heart felt so light, he wanted to leap from his seat. "It's a battalion of celestial army engineers! Wow, did they ever make those trout and all shoot up into the air! I've never had such a fun trip. This is great!"

"If we saw those trout up close, they would be this big. What a lot of fish there must be in this water."

"Do you think there are some small fish, too?" the girl asked, attracted into the conversation.

"There should be. Since there are big fish, there must be little ones as well. But because it was far away we couldn't see the little ones just now." Giovanni answered the girl with an interested smile. He had completely recovered his good humor.

"Look, those must be the shrines of the twin stars!" the little boy exclaimed suddenly, as he pointed out of the window.

On a low hill to the right stood two little shrines side by side. They looked as though they were made of crystal.

"What are the shrines of the twin stars?"

"I heard about them lots of times from my mother before—there are two little shrines standing side by side and they're made of crystal so I'm sure that's what they are."

“Please tell us about them. What did she say the twin stars did?”

“I know,” said the little boy. “The twin stars went to play in the fields and got into a fight with a crow.”

“They did not! Let me see, Mama used to tell the story this way: On the banks of the river of heaven . . .”

“And then a comet came by huffing and puffing.”

“Don’t be a pest, Tadashi, it doesn’t go like that. You’re talking about a different story.”

“Aren’t they playing their flutes over there right now?”

“Nope, they’re in the ocean now.”

“No, no, no, they’re already back from the ocean now, Tadashi.”

“Right, right. I know all about it. I’ll tell the story.”

Suddenly, the far bank of the river turned crimson. Alders and other trees stood out an inky black against the light and the invisible waves of the river of heaven glittered from time to time with brilliant red needles. In the fields on the opposite bank burned an enormous crimson fire. The black smoke, billowing up, seemed almost to scorch even the chill deep purple sky. Redder and more translucent than a ruby, more deliriously beautiful than a lithium flame, the fire burned.

“What fire is that?” said Giovanni. “I wonder what you need to burn to get such a shining red fire.”

“It’s the fire of Scorpio,” replied Campanella, studying his map.

“Oh, I know about the fire of Scorpio,” the girl exclaimed.

“What is it?” Giovanni asked.

“Scorpio, the scorpion, burned to death. My father always told me that its fire keeps burning to this very day.”

“But a scorpion’s an insect, isn’t it?”

“Yes, it’s an insect, but a good insect.”

“Scorpions aren’t good! I saw one preserved in alcohol in the

museum. It had a barb like this on its tail, and my teacher said if it stung you, you'd die."

"That's true, but it's still a good insect. According to my father, the story goes like this: Long ago on the plains of Bardora there lived a scorpion who got along from day to day by killing and eating small insects and the like. Then one day it was discovered by a weasel and it seemed as though the scorpion would soon be eaten. The scorpion tried desperately to get away but in the end it seemed the weasel would catch him for sure. At that moment the scorpion suddenly fell into a well that lay in its path. Try as it might, the scorpion could not climb up from the well and it began to drown. Whereupon the scorpion made this prayer: 'Alas, I cannot even count the number of lives I have taken before today. And now when this self-same "I" was about to be caught by a weasel, what an effort I made to escape. Yet look what has become of me in the end. Truly, everything in life is uncertain. Oh, why did I not offer my own body without complaint to the weasel? Had I done so, the weasel would most likely have extended its life for one more day. Please, God, look into my heart. In my next life let me not throw my life away in vain like this, but, rather, use my body for the true happiness of everyone.' That was his prayer. Then the scorpion saw its own body burn, becoming a beautiful crimson fire that lit up the darkness of night. Father said it's still burning today. I'm sure that fire there is the scorpion's."

"You're right. Look, those triangular markers there are arranged in the shape of a scorpion."

Giovanni saw how indeed the three triangular markers on the far side of the fire were arranged exactly in the shape of a scorpion's claws, while the five triangular markers on this side were shaped like its tail and barb. And, in fact, there it was burning, bright as bright and utterly soundless, the beautiful crimson fire of the scorpion.

As the fire slipped gradually further and further behind them, they could all hear various strange and lively sorts of music, something like the smell of wild flowers mixed with the clamor of whistling and many excited voices. They realized that they must be near a town or village with a festival under way.

Suddenly the little boy, who had been dozing beside Giovanni, shouted, "Centaurus, send the dew!" He was gazing out of the far window.

In the distance stood cedars and firs of a deep bluish-green like Christmas trees. In their branches were countless tiny lights like a host of fireflies.

"That's right, tonight is the night of the Centaurus festival, isn't it?"

"This must be the village of Centaurus," Campanella quickly replied.

* * *

[At this point, one or possibly more pages of manuscript are missing from the text.]

* * *

"When we play catch, I never miss the ball," the little boy boasted.

"We'll be at the Southern Cross soon," the youth said to them. "You should get ready."

"I'm going to keep riding on the train for a little bit more," the boy declared.

The girl beside Campanella stood and began hastily putting things in order, but it was clear that she, too, was reluctant to part from Giovanni and Campanella.

"We have to get off here," the young man said firmly, looking down at the little boy.

"I don't want to! I'll go once I've ridden the train some more."

Giovanni could not resist the urge to join in. "You can come with us. We have a ticket that lets us go anywhere."

"But we've got to get off here. This is the place where you go to heaven," the girl said sadly.

"You don't need to go to heaven or any place like that. Our teacher told us we should build a place that's better than heaven right here."

"But our mother is already there, and, besides, God tells us to."

"That sort of god is a false god."

"Your god is a false god."

"That's not so."

"What sort of god is your god?" the young man intervened smiling.

"I don't really know, but in any case my god isn't like that, my god is the true and only god."

"The true god is of course only one."

"But my god isn't like that. My god is the only true, true god."

"And so it is just as I said, isn't it? We pray that you both will meet us some day in the presence of that same true God." The young man folded his hands reverently. The girl did the same. Everyone seemed to turn a little pale with the pain of parting.

Giovanni was close to tears and his voice wavered as he spoke. "Are you all ready? We'll be at the Southern Cross soon."

It was then that they saw it. Far downstream there rose a cross like a lone tree from the midst of the invisible waters of the heavenly river. Sparkling, set with blue and orange and all sorts of lights, it was crowned by a halo-like ring of palely shining clouds. A current of excitement ran through the train. Just as had





happened at the Northern Cross, everyone rose smartly to their feet and began to pray. All that could be heard here and there was a happy cry, as when a child leaps up and plucks a gourd, or a sigh, ineffably deep and humble. Then, gradually, the cross came abreast of their window and they could see the circlet of clouds, pale as the flesh of apples, slowly, gently turning.

“Hallelujah! Hallelujah!” the voices of the people resounded bright and joyful. And from the farthest reaches of that sky, that chill sky, everyone heard the indescribably fresh, transparent call of a trumpet. Then, passing a cluster of signals and electric lamps, the train gradually slowed, until it came at last to a full stop directly opposite the cross.

“We get off here.” The young man took the boy’s hand and began walking toward the carriage door.

The girl turned and said to Giovanni and Campanella, “Well, goodbye.”

“Goodbye.” As he fought the urge to cry, Giovanni’s reply was so curt it seemed angry.

The girl’s eyes opened wide with the pain of her emotions and she turned once more in the boys’ direction, then proceeded silently on her way. The train was over half-empty now. All at once it had become lonely and deserted with the wind rushing in.

They looked and saw all the people kneeling devoutly in rows on the shore of the Milky Way river in front of the cross. Both boys saw a god-like figure robed in white approaching with outstretched arms across the invisible water of the heavenly river. But at that moment a glassy whistle blew and, just as the train was beginning to move, a silvery mist rolled smoothly in from further downstream and blocked their view. Only lots of walnut trees stood flashing their leaves in the mist while electric squirrels with golden halos poked their charming faces, first here, then there, from among the branches.

The mist began silently to lift. There was a road bound for somewhere, equipped with its own row of small electric lights in the manner of a major thoroughfare. For a while it ran alongside the tracks. Whenever the boys started to pass one of the lights, its pea-colored fire would suddenly go out, exactly as if it were signaling a greeting. Then, when they had gone on by, it came back on again.

When they glanced back they found the cross had become so small it looked as though it could be worn around someone's neck. It was too hazy for them to tell whether the girl and the others were still kneeling on the sand in front of the cross or had gone to their heaven, which lay they knew not where.

Giovanni heaved a deep sigh. "We're back to just the two of us alone again, aren't we? Let's go on and on together forever. I wouldn't mind being like the scorpion and having my body burnt a hundred times over as long as it really was for the sake of everyone's happiness."

Bright tears welled up in Campanella's eyes. "I feel the same way," he said.

"But I wonder what true happiness really is," said Giovanni.

"I don't know," said Campanella in a far-away voice.

"Well, we'll give it our best, won't we!" Giovanni exclaimed, drawing a deep breath as though new strength were surging up within him.

"Oh, there's the Coal Sack over there! It's a hole in the sky!" Campanella shrank back a little from the spot in the Milky Way river even as he pointed it out. When Giovanni saw it, his heart froze. In one part of the heavenly river gaped a huge pitch-black hole. He could not tell how deep the bottom was or what might be inside. No matter how much he peered into it, rubbing his eyes, he could make nothing out; only his eyes began to smart.

"Even if I were in the middle of that huge darkness, I wouldn't be afraid," said Giovanni. "I really am going to go and

search for the true happiness of everyone. Let's go on together, on and on and on forever."

"I'll go for sure. . . . How beautiful those fields are! Everyone's there. Now, that's the real heaven! Look, my mother is there!" Campanella shouted, pointing toward the beautiful fields he could see in the distance beyond the window.

Giovanni looked, but saw nothing but hazy whiteness; it did not appear at all as Campenella described. As he gazed vacantly at the spot, feeling unbearably lonely, he noticed two telegraph poles on the opposite bank; the red crosspieces of both poles touched as though they were standing with linked arms.

"We'll go together, won't we, Campanella?" Giovanni glanced back as he spoke, but in Campanella's seat there was no longer any sign of his friend, just the shining black velvet of the seat cover. Giovanni shot to his feet like a bullet. Leaning far out of the window so that no one could hear him, he beat his chest fiercely with all his strength and shouted. Then he burst into tears, the sobs filling his throat. It seemed to him that everything around him had suddenly turned pitch dark.

Giovanni opened his eyes. Tired out, he had been sleeping on the grassy slope. His chest was strangely hot and cold tears ran down his cheeks.

Like a coiled spring suddenly released, Giovanni leapt to his feet. Just as before, the town below him was threaded with lantern lights but he could not help thinking that the lights were more animated than before. And the Milky Way, beside which he had just been strolling in his dream, now stretched as before, filmy white across the sky. Above the inky-black southern horizon it was particularly hazy, with the red star of Scorpio twinkling prettily to the right. The position of the stars in the sky had not shifted very much, it seemed.

Giovanni raced off down the hill. With a rush of feeling he had remembered his mother waiting at home, still waiting to eat her

supper. Quickly passing through the grove of black pine trees, he followed along the dim white fence of the dairy farm until he came to the familiar gate through which he entered and walked to the front of the darkened dairy barn. A cart loaded with two barrels had been left in front of the barn. Since it was not there before, Giovanni took it for a sign that someone had returned.

"Good evening!" he called out.

"Coming!"

A man in baggy white trousers soon appeared standing before Giovanni.

"What can I do for you?"

"The milk wasn't delivered to our house today."

"Sorry about that."

The man immediately disappeared inside and reappeared with a bottle of milk which he handed to Giovanni.

"I really am sorry," he said. "I wasn't paying attention this afternoon and left the gate open. Chief didn't waste any time going to where his mother was and drinking up a good half of what she had." The man laughed.

"Oh. Well, I'll be on my way."

"Right. My apologies."

"Don't mention it."

Wrapping his hands around the still-warm bottle of milk, Giovanni headed out the gate of the dairy farm.

He made his way for a while through a part of town that was full of trees until he came to the main street. Continuing along the main street for a bit, he arrived at the cross-shaped intersection. To the right, at the end of the road, the towers of a large bridge rose dim against the night sky. The bridge spanned the spot in the river where Campanella and the others had gone to set their lanterns afloat.

In front of the store at the intersection a number of women had gathered in groups of about seven or eight. They spoke together

in low voices and kept glancing toward the bridge. The bridge itself was crowded with all sorts of lights and lanterns.

He did not know why, but Giovanni felt his chest turn to ice. Almost shouting, he immediately asked the group nearest him, "Has something happened?"

"A boy fell in the river," one answered. The rest all turned and looked at Giovanni.

Giovanni ran toward the bridge in a daze. It was so crowded with people he could not see the river. There were even some policemen in their white uniforms in the crowd.

From the roadway in front of the bridge Giovanni leapt down to the broad, flat river bed below.

All along the river's edge there were lights, lots of them, restlessly coming and going. There were also seven or eight lanterns moving along the embankment on the opposite shore. Between the two banks flowed the river, calm and gray and barely audible, already clear of crow gourd lanterns.

Far downstream on a sandbar that jutted out into the river stood a group of people, their figures black and sharply etched. Giovanni ran toward them quickly. On the way he came across Marson, one of the boys who had been with Giovanni earlier. Marson dashed up to Giovanni.

"Giovanni, Campanella went in the river!"

"Why? When?"

"We were on the boat and Zanelli tried to push his lantern into the current. I think he fell in, because the boat rocked just as he was reaching out. Campanella jumped right in after him and pushed him toward the boat. Zanelli grabbed hold of the bow but afterward we couldn't see Campanella."

"Everybody must be looking for him."

"Yes, everyone came down right away. Campanella's father came, too, but we haven't been able to find him. They took Zanelli home."

Giovanni went to the place where everyone had gathered. There stood Campanella's father with his long chin and pale face. He was surrounded by schoolboys and people from the town. Dressed in a black suit, he was standing very straight and staring at a watch that he held in his right hand.

Everyone was gazing fixedly at the river. No one said a word. Giovanni's knees shook. Lots of acetylene lamps of the sort used for fishing moved restlessly back and forth over the river, and Giovanni could see it flowing, its black water forming small, fluting ripples.

Downstream the breadth of the river reflected the whole vast Milky Way so that it did not seem to be water so much as the sky itself. Giovanni could not help thinking that the Campanella they were looking for only existed now at the end of that Milky Way.

Everyone else, however, seemed caught up still in the expectation that Campanella would soon emerge from the waves, exclaiming over what a swim he had had, or else that he might be waiting on an unknown sandbar somewhere for someone to come. Campanella's father, however, soon said emphatically, "It's no use, it's been forty-five minutes since he went in."

Without thinking, Giovanni ran over to the professor and stood facing him. He was about to say that he knew where Campanella had gone, that he had just been walking together with Campanella, but his throat caught and he could not utter a word. The professor probably thought that Giovanni had come to pay his respects and he gazed at him steadily for a moment, then said politely, "You must be Giovanni. Thank you for your help this evening."

Giovanni nodded his head in acknowledgment without saying anything.

Gripping his watch tightly, the professor asked, "Is your father back home now?"

"No." Giovanni shook his head just a little.

“I wonder why? The day before yesterday I had a very enthusiastic letter from him. He expected to arrive today or thereabouts. His ship must be a bit behind schedule. Giovanni, I’d like you to come over after school tomorrow with the others.”

As he spoke the professor again shifted his gaze downstream to where the reflected image of the Milky Way filled the river.

Giovanni, his heart a jumble of emotions, parted from the professor without a word. Eager to bring his mother the milk and to let her know that his father would soon be home, he raced off at top speed along the river bed, heading toward town.

Reader's Guide
to Night of the
Milky Way Railway

Reader's Guide

1

The Afternoon Lesson

Giovanni and Campanella (p. 3)

These names and the name of one of the other schoolboys, Zanelli, are very clearly not Japanese and suggest, if anything, an Italian flavor. The Mediterranean feel this lends the story is reinforced by certain details in the village scenes in the opening chapters. For example, as befits an Italian schoolboy, Giovanni buys not rice for gruel, but bread and sugar cubes for his invalid mother before returning home. Kale and asparagus, uncommon in Japan, grow in crates outside his door, while the dish he eats for his dinner is made from the most un-Japanese of vegetables, the tomato.

Given this clear use of European motifs, it is not surprising to learn that in writing *Night of the Milky Way Railway* Kenji was influenced by the work of an Italian writer, Edmondo de Amicis (1846–1908). Amicis's rather sentimental but in its day extremely popular story, *Curore* (Heart) (1886), would have been available to Kenji in a 1920 translation by Maeda Akira. The many correspondences in plot—the poor boy's friendship with the popular and well-to-do class leader, the father who is said to

be off working in America but who is actually languishing in jail, the toy train that provides afterschool entertainment, the story of the youth who gives up his chance to board a lifeboat on a sinking ship in order to save the life of a young girl, and more—as well, of course, as the Italian setting, point unmistakably to the framing episodes of *Night of the Milky Way Railway*.

While Kenji was clearly inspired by Amicis's tale, he by no means borrowed Amicis's names for his characters. There is no Giovanni in *Curore*. That choice, a name so common as to suggest everyman, was Kenji's own, as was the less familiar Campanella.

The Italian names of the two young travelers of the galactic railway as well as the European atmosphere of their hometown contrast with the Japanese names of the otherwise Western children whom Giovanni and Campanella meet on the train. It is one of the ironies of Kenji's tale that these Christian children, victims of a shipwreck based on the story of the Titanic, should be, at least superficially, Japanese, while Giovanni and Campanella, who clearly are intended to be more familiar to the reader and whose outlook is more recognizably Japanese, are, as far as appearances go, European. By superimposing the exotic on the familiar, the familiar on the exotic, Kenji cleverly challenges conventional distinctions of familiar and foreign. It should be noted that this curiously effective device creates obvious problems in translation where, depending upon the language, the foreign and familiar labels are at risk of being reversed once again.

Since few specific physical features are mentioned, readers of the story, whether in translation or not, can make whatever adjustments their imagination requires to their own mental images of the characters. Film, on the other hand, demands a specific and unequivocal image. The European identity of the two heroes might have posed a problem in the making of the 1985 film version of *Night of the Milky Way Railway* in Japan had not the

animator, Masumura Hiroshi, already solved the problem of cultural identity in his drawings by depicting Giovanni and Campanella as well as most of the other villagers as racially neutral cats.

The Water of the Milky Way as a Vacuum (p. 5)

If we understand the vacuum of this passage to be equivalent to empty space, we will catch most but not quite all of the sense. It is important to note that Kenji felt a vacuum to be part of the matrix of life not only on the macro level of the universe, but on the micro level as well. According to a memo written in 1924, he considered the constituent ingredient of the newly discovered subatomic particle, the electron, to be a vacuum. On the basis of this and other like memos, it is clear that Kenji believed that other types of matter, besides our familiar composites of atoms and molecules, might exist with the same vacuum as their basis. This allowed for the possibility of other worlds existing, each having empty space (a vacuum) as their essence.

The characters used for the modern word “vacuum” (*shinkū*) mean roughly “true space” or “true emptiness.” The character denoting “space” or “emptiness” (*kū*) is also the one traditionally used to express the Buddhist concept of *śūnyatā*, the fundamental principle of emptiness, or absence of any independently existing entity, a principle that Buddhists feel represents the true nature of reality.

Kenji made the connection between the scientific concept of vacuum and the traditional philosophical notion of emptiness clear in such long poems as “Vacuum Solvent” (*Shinkū yōbai*) and “The Pass of the Five Rings” (*Gorin tōge*). Thus, when the teacher informs his students that they themselves “are living in the waters of the Milky Way,” he is doing something more than establishing their location within his metaphor for cosmic space, he is also subtly reminding them and us of the universally “empty” nature of their existence.

The Large Lens (p. 5)

Even for us in the late twentieth century the teacher's model of the Milky Way seems a clever and eminently valid sort of visual aid. As early as the eighteenth century, Immanuel Kant had correctly guessed the shape of our Milky Way galaxy by making an analogy to elliptical nebulae. Kenji's lens reflects that knowledge. We should bear in mind, however, that even though the shape had been determined, in Kenji's day the enormous size of our galaxy and its relationship to its neighbors were only just becoming known.

Kenji used the image of a lens as a metaphor for the Milky Way in his poem “Aomori Elegy” (Aomori banka) written in the summer of 1923 in mourning for his sister who had died in November of the preceding year. In the opening passage of the poem, the poet imagines that the train on which he is riding is traveling through the center of the Milky Way:

The train soars through the center of an enormous apple of hydrogen gas,
the brilliantly clear crystalline lens that is the Milky Way . . .

Interestingly, this passage, thought to be a catalytic first step toward Kenji's eventual writing of *Night of the Milky Way Railway*, links the image of the lens with that of an apple of clear hydrogen gas. Both apples and hydrogen play an important role in Kenji's eventual telling of the Milky Way story.

2

At the Printer's

Crow Gourd Lanterns and the Evening's Star Festival (p. 7)

In Finnish-Ugric mythology the Milky Way was the path that the souls of the dead traveled from this world to the next. In Teutonic tradition as well, the Milky Way was a road and the fabulous Valkyries were thought to carry the spirits of the slain warriors to their reward by following this celestial route. Many different

groups of North American Indians identified the Milky Way as the path or trail taken by ghosts of the dead on their way to the manifold land of the spirits.

These myths, taken from disparate cultures, are striking for the continuity of concept they display. We have no reason to assume, however, from our knowledge of the books he read or from the intrinsic evidence of his manuscripts, that Kenji was acquainted with any of them. Rather, his festival of the Milky Way and the galactic journey to which it is linked seem to be the product of his own imagination aided only by an occasional reference to two familiar Japanese traditions.

The first of these traditions is, of course, Tanabata, the late summer star festival celebrating the legendary annual meeting of the herdboy star (Altair) and the weaver maid (Vega) across the waters of the river of heaven. The legend was absorbed from China into Japanese folklore very early, certainly by the sixth century. There are many different versions of the Tanabata story, but in one popular one, the two lovers are said to meet by crossing the waters on a bridge made by willing magpies extending their wings. Kenji clearly alludes to this tradition when he has the children traveling on the celestial train catch sight of a row of magpies "quietly basking in the soft gleam of the river" in chapter 9.

At Tanabata time children all over Japan decorate branches of dwarf bamboo (*sasatake*) with brightly colored cards inscribed with poems about the two stars. These festive boughs stand outside each house in much the same way the cypress branches do in Kenji's story. In Kenji's hometown of Hanamaki there was a special custom of fashioning lanterns of crow gourds to be set before these festive bamboo boughs on the last night of Tanabata. The insides of the green, fist-sized gourds were hollowed out and a candle was inserted. Perhaps the best image for Americans would be that of a very small green jack-o'-lantern, aglow, but without a frightening face.

The crow gourds of Hanamaki's traditional Tanabata celebrations were not set adrift as lanterns on the nearby Kitakami river. That image belongs to Obon, the second important late summer festival influencing Kenji's story. By the old calendar, Obon is celebrated during the nine days following Tanabata. While it has little relation to stars, it has quite a lot to do with journeying souls.

At Obon time, spirits of the ancestral dead are welcomed back to the village. After being feted with dances and merriment, they are sent off again. In some areas of Japan, including Kenji's Hanamaki, the communities mark this sending off of the spirits by setting small lamps adrift on the local river. While there is no particular tradition of fashioning these spirit lamps from crow gourds, few Japanese would be likely to miss the allusion to *tōrō-nagashi* (lantern floating) at Obon. The image pairs the river dotted with drifting spirit lamps with the heavenly river of the Milky Way that stretches above. Both, for Kenji, are pathways of the soul.

3 Home

The Specimen Room (p. 12)

As a scientist and science teacher, Kenji was fascinated by fossils and natural specimens of all sorts. In his essay “The English Coast” (*Igirisu kaigan*), he relates how, in the summer of 1923, he and his students from the agricultural school hunted for “specimens,” particularly the fossil footprints of animals, along a stretch of nearby riverbank they jokingly named after the chalky coast of southern England.

That the hunting of specimens carries, for Kenji, a spiritual import beyond the simple quest for scientific information is clear in such poems as “Koiwai Farm” (*Koiwai nōjō*), where the poet identifies the ethereal beings who appear at his side in a vision as

the same whose sign he sought to discover in a search for fossil footprints:

I'm walking with my eyes firmly open
 Yuria Pemperu my distant fiends,
 how long it has been since I last saw
 your huge, pure white unshod feet
 How I searched for your archaic footprints
 in ancient beaches of Cretaceous shale. . . .

When Kenji made his train journey to Sakhalin in the summer of 1923, all the while in deep mourning for his sister, he wrote in one of his many poems depicting the trip that he would start the homeward journey "loaded with specimens." What were these specimens he had collected? Kenji does not tell us, but the poet and imaginative scholar Amazawa Taijirō, aware of the profound psychological importance of the journey, comments that in such a context a specimen represents for Kenji the "sole sign, an eternally enduring manifestation, left behind by 'that which dies.'" The link with the departed Toshiko is clear.

The sociologist, Mita Munesuke, struck by Amazawa's observation, has used it as an aid to reading this passage of *Night of the Milky Way Railway*:

The reason Giovanni dwells so on the specimen of the crab shell and of the reindeer horn in the opening of *Night of the Milky Way Railway* is because they are *proof of the existence of his absent father*. This seems to symbolize the significance of "specimen" in Kenji's work. "Specimens" and related items such as "fossils," "footprints," and "transparent beings," are first and foremost *proof of the existence of non-existent things*. At least they are firm evidence of the existence of things that do not exist in "present" time. [Italics in original]

We should keep Mita's comments in mind as we go on to consider Giovanni's later adventures on the Pliocene Coast.

4

The Night of the Centaurus Festival**The Centaurus Festival (p. 15)**

What Kenji earlier calls the “festival of the Milky Way” and the “star festival,” he here refers to quite specifically as the “Centaurus festival.” While the references to Tanabata remain valid, Kenji has deliberately chosen this constellation, visible from Japan (as well as the United States and southern Europe) only in early summer at the far southern end of the sky, rather than the legendary and easily seen Altair and Vega, to be the focus of his fanciful festival.

Why the remote Centaurus? The astronomer Saitō Bun’ichi has suggested that Kenji chose Centaurus because this constellation includes within it our own sun’s nearest galactic neighbor. The bright star Alpha Centaurus (Rigel Kent) is only 4.3 light years from the sun. In a galaxy roughly one hundred thousand light years in diameter, 4.3 light years amounts to a hair’s breadth. Perhaps it is significant, then, that the Centaurus festival celebrates village community in Kenji’s story. Later, as the little celestial train passes the constellation of Centaurus in the southern sky, we realize that the same festival is being celebrated there; most certainly a bond exists between these two galactic neighbors.

An association between Centaurus, decorative plants, and festivals appears in Kenji’s work years before he began to write *Night of the Milky Way Railway*. Among the collection of traditional poems (tanka) for the year 1917 is the following:

waga uruwashiki
Doitsu tōhi wa
toriyukite
Kentauru-sai no
kiyo-ki to semu

My lovely German
spruce
I will take and make of you
the sacred greens
of the Centaurus Festival

The mystery remains, but the reference to “German” spruce suggests northern European traditions. Certainly, there is more than a little of the magic of Christmas in Kenji’s summer festival in *Night of the Milky Way Railway* where the houses are decorated with “balls of yew sprigs and lanterns tied to cypress branches” (p. 7), and where, at the far end of the sky, “cedars and firs of a deep bluish-green like Christmas trees” are decorated for the occasion with “countless tiny lights” (p. 70).

Finally, something must be said about the dew that the children beg from Centaurus. Since the dawn of literacy in Japan, dew, with its tendency to evaporate quickly in the morning sun, has been used as a metaphor for the ephemeral nature of existence; all human beings lead “dew-drop lives.”

Dew for the nonconventional Kenji, however, is quite a different substance; rather than a reminder of impermanence, it is a sacred life-bestowing elixir sent from the sky. It is a pure dewlike rain, for example, that revives the minister in “Vacuum Solvent” from his “temporary death.” In the lovely story “Diamond of the Ten Sacred Powers” (*Jūriki no kongōseki*), the dew is the wonderful, magically beautiful diamond for which all the flowers yearn and which finally falls at the end of the tale. The children’s refrain of “Centaurus, send the dew” here surely suggests not something touched by melancholy, but rather the marvelous, life-giving substance depicted elsewhere in Kenji’s work.

The Star Song (p. 17)

Kenji refers to the star song as though all his readers will immediately recognize it as a well-known children’s ditty. He is simply being playful. The star song mentioned here, and again in chapters six and nine, is a reference to Kenji’s own “Song of the Circling Stars” (*Hoshi meguri no uta*). The lyrics for “Song of the Circling Stars” appear in Kenji’s early story “The Twin Stars” (*Futago no hoshi*). He also composed a tune for the piece.

During Kenji's lifetime, few people apart from the author would have been familiar with "Song of the Circling Stars," although the contemporary composer, Nakamura Setsuya, has pointed out that Kenji probably based his melody on a popular song from a 1918 musical called "Carmen."

The lyrics for "Song of the Circling Stars" are:

Scorpio of the red eye
 The spread wings of Aquila
 The blue eye of Canis Minor
 The coil of Serpens
 Orion sings loudly
 Sending down the frost and dew

The cloud of Andromeda—
 The shape of a fish's mouth
 The Great Bear has stretched
 His five legs northward
 Above the brow of the Lesser Bear,
 The lodestar in the circuit of the sky

5

The Pillar of the Weather Wheel

The Pillar of the Weather Wheel (p. 21)

This term, a literal translation of Kenji's *tenki-rin no hashira*, seems innocent enough, suggesting perhaps some sort of instrument having to do with weather and wheels. An attempt among scholars to pin the term down more specifically, however, has resulted in a proliferation of theories, some fanciful, some convincing, that in the end prove nothing definitive save the inventiveness of Kenji's original coinage and the enthusiasm and energy with which his work is read and studied in Japan today.

Roughly, the explanations surrounding the weather wheel can be divided into two groups: those that seek the inspiration for the image in religious practices, and those that trace the influence

back to Kenji's scientific studies. Of the several scholars who see a parallel between Kenji's weather wheel and Buddhist, Tibetan-style prayer wheels, Yoshimi Masanobu's theory seems particularly persuasive. Yoshimi notes that in Japan "dharma wheels" (*hōrin*) were sometimes placed on posts at temples so that the faithful could spin them, thereby earning merit and a chance for release from life's endless round of rebirth and suffering. Not all temples had these wheels, but in Kenji's day the Shōanji in his hometown of Hanamaki did. This dharma wheel was first erected in the 1860s. By the 1920s it had rotted away but was replaced by a second one. This in turn was destroyed during the bombing of Hanamaki in World War II, so that the current one (number three) dates from after the war. As a child and young man Kenji would have been familiar with the original wheel and post. Yoshimi points out that there was a folk belief that spinning the wheel at times of drought would bring much needed rain, hence the reference to weather in Kenji's term. Yoshimi reports that children would spin the wheel with cries of "rain, rain," reminding us of the children in the story who beg Centaurus for the dew.

Significantly, Kenji's weather wheel is located at the top of a slope. This is made clear in *Night of the Milky Way Railway* as well as in a formal poem by Kenji quoted by Yoshimi that uses the same mysterious term: "When I came panting up the level top of the slope/ The weather wheel looked out over the horizon. . . ." Located at a high point in the landscape, associated with the rain-granting powers of the Buddhist faith, Yoshimi's weather wheel emerges clearly as an Eliadean-style *axis mundi*, a point of convergence between the other world and this. While other scholars of the religious camp eschew the notion of the dharma wheel and explore as far as Brueghel's paintings and the twelfth chapter of the *Lotus Sutra* for other prototypes, they all, like

Yoshimi, arrive at this central concept of a sacred pillar to make their point.

On the scientific side of things, Nemoto Junkichi has attracted considerable interest in his theory that Kenji's weather wheel is inspired by the phenomenon of a sun pillar. Sun pillars are most often seen in very cold regions where refraction of light through ice crystals suspended in the atmosphere sometimes creates a mirage of a white pillar of light stretching above and below the setting sun. Nemoto points out that Kenji might well have seen a drawing of a sun pillar in a book on atmospheric optics known to have been in the collection of the Morioka Meteorological Observatory at the time. While Nemoto's theory sheds little light on the possible symbolic overtones of Kenji's weather wheel, and also seems peculiarly insensitive to the seasonal setting of the tale, the image of the sun pillar does suggest the beautiful luminosity of Kenji's pillar, which in the next chapter pulses "on and off like a firefly" on its way to becoming Giovanni's portal to the sky.

The Dragon Palace at the Bottom of the Sea (p. 24)

Although Kenji's imagination is most often directed skyward, he does on occasion allude to magical lands under the sea. Here he seems to be referring to the old legend of the dragon palace made famous in Japan through the folk tale "Urashima Tarō." (Kenji does not use the word "dragon" expressly, but his term "palace at the bottom of the sea" suggests it.)

The notion that a lavish palace ruled by a wise dragon (or *naga* in the Sanskrit tradition) existed in the depths of the sea arrived in Japan by way of China after an ancient start in India. Kenji's use of the motif here and in such stories as "The Twin Stars" would be reassuring to Japanese readers for its very familiarity, in contrast to the startling landscapes Kenji invents

from whole cloth for his celestial train ride. By making the village into a scene from the legendary dragon palace, Kenji deftly alludes to the underwater imagery of the preceding chapter where “the utterly clear air flowed along the streets and through the shops like water” (p. 17), and at the same time suggests our entry into a new realm of fantasy in which the village will be first located and then left behind at the very bottom of an amazing new world.

6

The Milky Way Station

Triangular Markers (p. 25)

“Triangular marker” is a term coined by Kenji and, in its own way, is as puzzling as the other famous coinage, “the pillar of the weather wheel,” we discussed above. In the case of the triangular markers, however, there seems to be considerable agreement among scholars concerning the original inspiration in the temporary pyramidal structures erected by surveyors conducting large-scale projects such as mapping. Unlike permanent markers made of stone or concrete and embedded in the ground, the structure of the temporary marker made of wood or metal rises above ground. Some are as high as ten or twenty meters.

Clearly, these beautifully luminous markers were linked in Kenji’s mind with images of the constellations and configurations of stars. The association with surveyor’s markers prepares the reader in a small way for the curious civil engineering project depicted in chapter nine. It also underlines the ironic hope expressed frequently throughout the work (Campanella’s obsidian map comes to mind) for exactitude of knowledge as to place and time in this fabulous world of the unknown.

A Narrow-Gauge Railway Car (p. 26)

As many commentators have pointed out, Kenji's real-life model for his fanciful railroad was the Iwate Light Railway that ran eastward from his hometown of Hanamaki on what was at times an elevated narrow-gauge track. After Kenji's time the line ceased operation and was replaced by a more modern conventional-sized line, but the photos of the old Iwate Light Railway suggest a charming toylike little train with a steam-driven engine.

Mita Munesuke, with his customary insightfulness, notes the impact the experience of train lines must have had on people living in turn-of-the-century Japan. For the first time in the history of this rural and mountainous nation, people were presented with a concrete image of a straight line leading off into what seemed like infinity. The two lines of rail merging in the distance had the symbolic value of a journey, bound not just for the bustling metropolis of Tokyo and other smaller provincial "Tokyos," but for the indefinable "far beyond." In developing his extended fantasy of celestial railway, Kenji was mining, as a good writer should, one of the governing metaphors for his age.

It is also important to note the Buddhist resonances in Kenji's use of the image of the railway. As the scholar Onda Itsuo points out, the name "Mahayana" in the term "Mahayana Buddhism" (the broadly defined northern Buddhism practiced throughout China, Korea, and Japan) means "great vehicle." In other words, the teachings of the religion are seen as a vehicle that can transport large numbers of people to the ideal "other shore" or *higan* (nirvana). In Kenji's case this "other shore" lay at the far southern end of the Milky Way.

Western writers, too, have explored the idea of a train or bus line to the heavens. We have Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Celestial Railroad" and E. M. Forster's "The Celestial Omnibus." Both of these writers, however, have treated

their theme satirically. While the train (or bus) might appear to be ‘‘bound for glory,’’ they lavish the bulk of their attention upon the sinner who comically fails to reach the sought-for destination.

Cygnus Station (p. 26)

With the Cygnus Station we encounter the first of a number of references to constellations in *Night of the Milky Way Railway*. Interestingly, Kenji starts his journey near the apex of the night-time summer sky with Cygnus (the Swan) and its asterism, the Northern Cross. From that high point he travels southward down the Milky Way to Centaurus and the Southern Cross, stellar configurations that for us in the mid-latitudes of the northern hemisphere (Hanamaki is at roughly 39 degrees north latitude, on a line with New Jersey) lie below the horizon.

Having plotted such a course, Kenji is able to present a cross near both the beginning and the end of his journey. When, in the next chapter, the train draws near to the station and the boys with shouts of Hallelujah ringing in their ears see a dazzling white cross standing on an island in the middle of the celestial river, the Christian nature of the cross becomes unmistakably clear. Kusaka points out that in seventeenth-century European astronomy, the five bright stars within Cygnus, which the ancient Greeks had seen as a swan with outspread wings, were filtered through the lens of Christian faith to become the Cross of Calvary, our Northern Cross. Kenji was clearly interested in the soteriological and cosmological teachings of Christianity, and he more than once linked Christian notions of heaven with visions of the starry sky. In a more ironical mood in 1924 he wrote the following:

[Tonight's sky] is that heaven towards which a cynical
astronomer stupidly trains his telescope
saying he wishes to know just exactly where
the heavenly being is that the monks

with round shaven pates
 wearing gray sackcloth call God
 It is the sort of bright sky
 towards which this time a believing scientist
 trains his glass
 seeking to discover the same heaven
 in a spot above one of the stars . . .

The “monks with round shaven pates” are of course Christian monks, not Buddhist ones. Kenji might have found their faith naive (he was acquainted with both Catholicism and some varieties of Protestantism), but he was clearly intrigued. His handling of the vision of the Northern Cross reflects his outsider’s emotions with respect to Christianity—a mixture of attraction, circumspection, and awe.

The Silver River of the Milky Way (p. 27)

Here, and through much of the early part of his story, Kenji uses the word *ginga*, literally “river of silver,” to refer to the Milky Way. The word comes to Japanese through the Chinese. The beauty of the word was noted by the poet Takamura Kōtarō who once commented to Kenji’s brother, Mr. Miyazawa Seiroku, that any English translator of Kenji’s story should use an expression such as “silver river” rather than the imaginistically misleading “Milky Way” to render the term. Acknowledging the wisdom and, above all, the poetic sensibility behind Takamura’s comment, but realizing also the English reader’s need for a firm footing in the conventions of English usage, I have used the term “silver river” only when the allusion to the Milky Way can be readily deduced. It is curious that in the later half of the story Kenji uses the more purely Japanese expression of *ama no kawa*, literally “river of heaven,” rather than *ginga* to refer to the galaxy.

7

The Northern Cross and the Pliocene Coast

Pliocene Coast (p. 36)

Pliocene is a now somewhat dated geological term for an epoch that existed roughly five and a half to two million years ago. As geological time goes, the Pliocene epoch was rather recent, occurring just prior to the Pleistocene with its ice and woolly mammoths. The Pliocene itself was marked by intense volcanic activity, as well as by a gradual global cooling and drying. The Japanese archipelago as we know it took shape during this time. Throughout much of the globe, flowering plants abounded and mammals grew larger and more dominant. Cloven-hoofed animals, including members of the bovidae family related to the modern cow, were among the mammals that found conditions in the Pliocene favorable. In referring to a fossil “bos” (p. 40) (*bos* is Latin for cow), Kenji probably had in mind something like the Bovidae (*Bos acuifrons*) found in late Pliocene rock in China, or he might have been thinking of the slightly more recent Aurochs (*Bos primigenius*), a magnificent ox almost as large as an elephant whose portrait is painted on the walls of the caves of Lascaux.

In depicting this rather surprising scene of celestial paleontology, Kenji clearly drew heavily on his own experiences along the Kitakami River, especially during the summer of 1923. We have already noted the importance he attached to the strip of river bank he dubbed the “English Coast.” Like the river bank in *Night of the Milky Way Railway*, Kenji’s English Coast was composed of a whitish stone made of sedimented mud and volcanic ash. Also, like the celestial river bank, this stone frequently yielded (and continues to yield) specimens of partially fossilized walnuts. Miyazawa Seiroku describes these petrified walnuts as “much larger than today’s walnuts with deep folds

on the surface," and he notes that they are "astonishingly fresh and pliable." Kenji, along with his students, was the first to discover these ancient walnuts. His find was confirmed by a Tokyo University professor who visited Hanamaki in 1925 at Kenji's urging. While Kenji's essay "The English Coast" mentions that fossilized animal footprints were also found in the mudstone of the river bank, that discovery was never verified.

The origins of Kenji's image of the Pliocene Coast and its fossils do not, however, explain their significance within his story. It is the paleontologist (a figure drawn with the satiric humor of self-mockery) who puts Kenji's characteristic philosophical spin on the scene by asserting that the fossils are needed as "proof." This proof will serve to correct the view of those who think of the "fine thick stratum of earth" as "wind or perhaps water or even empty sky" (p. 40); in other words, it will persuade people like ourselves that the empty sky is something other than it seems. Much in the same way that the specimens mentioned in chapter three function as evidence of the existence of absent things, the professor's finds serve as proof of the validity of another usually unseen dimension of existence. This quasi-scientific yet metaphysical "fourth dimension" is of the utmost importance to Kenji as he pursues the course of the Milky Way Railway.

8

The Bird Catcher

The Bird Catcher (p. 41)

The awkward, well-intentioned bird catcher is perhaps the most appealing of the many strange travelers on the Milky Way railway. To understand his role in the story it is useful to keep in mind that Kenji was the eldest son in a family that made a good living from a pawn shop business. As Kenji was well aware, the

family's clientele were drawn from the very poorest levels of the rural community; in a very real way the family's prosperity came at the expense of these impoverished peasants. Mita Munesuke has noted that Kenji again and again expressed in his writings the fear and terrible guilt he felt in the face of these people to whom he and his family owed their existence. The bird catcher is thus representative of the sort of person about whom not only Giovanni but Kenji himself always felt "unbearably sorry."

At the same time, the character of the bird catcher in the increasingly magical world of the Milky Way has managed to solve another enormous problem Kenji saw in existence, the question of the taking of life. Through much of his adult life Kenji was a vegetarian. While, as a Buddhist, he deplored killing of any kind, as a scientist he knew that all life was caught up in the food chain and dependent on other life for its existence. Repeatedly, in such stories as "The Night Hawk Star" (*Yodaka no hoshi*) and "The Bears of Mt. Nametoko" (*Nametoko yama no kuma*), Kenji showed sympathy for characters who, through their life circumstances, are forced against their inclination to kill in order to live.

In our imperfect world there is no escape from this "crime of existence," but in the fantastic world of the Milky Way, death and life are redefined; the cheerful bird catcher is no more guilty of taking life than is a child scooping sand at the seashore. While, in chapter nine, Giovanni feels terribly sorry about the bird catcher, the bird catcher himself quite rightly feels not the slightest pang of conscience over his beautiful and tasty catch.

Migratory Birds (p. 45)

Kenji mixes familiar features of the earth's atmosphere together with the phenomena of remote space in depicting his world of the Milky Way. Flocks of migrating geese or cranes passing high up in the spring or autumn air were, in the author's imagination, as

much a part of that other skyward realm as were the stars themselves. In addition, we should note that birds are often associated with the spirits of the dead in Japanese folk belief, and that Kenji was well aware of this tradition. In his beautiful poem “The White Birds” (*Shiroi tori*), Kenji, mourning his sister, recalls the ancient legend of Prince Yamato Takeru whose spirit when he died became a beautiful white bird flying up and away from the tomb. While it would be wrong to impose too heavy a symbolic weight on the comical flocks of chapters eight and nine, it is important to note the rightness of the birds’ presence in Kenji’s otherworldly realm.

9

Giovanni’s Ticket

The Observatory of Albireo (p. 49)

Albireo is the Arabic name for Beta Cygni, a beautiful double star at the southern limit of the constellation Cygnus. Albireo’s beauty springs from the fact that its two stars are of contrasting colors: Albireo A, the brighter one, is a red super giant, similar in its golden (topaz) color to our sun but over three hundred times bigger; the small bluish Albireo B is the sapphire globe of Kenji’s observatory. While Albireo B appears smaller and less bright, it actually burns at a hotter temperature than the golden Albireo A. The two stars are separated by a distance of roughly three hundred and ninety billion miles, not all that close as double stars go. While they are most probably in slow orbit around one another, that movement is not noticeable to an observer with a telescope; it is a dance measured in thousand-year steps.

In creating the beautiful rotating globes of the Albireo observatory, Kenji might have been influenced by the image of such variable eclipsing stars as Beta Lyrae. It is also just possible that he knew that Albireo A is itself a double star made up of a red

giant and a small blue dwarf so close they are all but merged.

We can only regret that the bird catcher is interrupted in his explanation of the function of the curious observatory. A rhythmical device that measures the rate of flow of a soundless, transparent galactic river seems simultaneously at the frontiers of whimsy and scientific thought.

Giovanni's Ticket (p. 52)

A mandala is generally thought of as a diagram, a schema representing the real or ideal universe. In the Nichiren sect, mandala refers not to a pictorial diagram, but to a schema composed of words. At the center of the Nichiren mandala (the *daihonzon*) are the characters of the Nichiren mantra (*Namu myōhō renge kyō*) written in the startling, bold hand of the founder of the sect. When Kenji became a member of the Kokuchūkai as a young man, he was sent a copy of this sacred mandala. He had it mounted to make a small hanging scroll and he installed it with considerable ceremony in his own home.

It is possible that the Nichiren mandala was at the back of Kenji's mind when he wrote of Giovanni's ticket and its "ten strange characters in an arabesque design" (p. 53). Certainly, he suggests that it possesses considerable power. The sense Giovanni and Campanella have of being sucked up into the ticket is reminiscent of the operation of the all-dissolving vacuum in Kenji's poem "Vacuum Solvent." It is interesting to note that in one of the very early versions of *Night of the Milky Way Railway*, the ticket was larger, the size of a handkerchief, and was held jointly by Giovanni and Campanella.

The Imperfect, Illusory Fourth Dimension (p. 53)

The early 1920s were an exhilarating time in the field of theoretical physics and the Japanese public shared in the excitement. The noted physicist Ishiwara Jun introduced the essentials of

Einstein's special theory of relativity in his *Principles of Relativity* (Sōtaisei genri) in 1921. Battling a scandal that left him stripped of his post at Tōhoku University, Ishiwara went on to publish Einstein's complete works in Japanese translation between 1922 and 1924, and toured with Einstein during his visit to Japan in 1922.

Thanks to Ishiwara's labors, the Japanese public, with Kenji included, was kept abreast of the exciting new ideas coming from Europe. Kenji almost certainly read *Principles of Relativity*. Irisawa notes that he jotted down Einstein's name in the margin of a rough draft of "In the starry sky that fills the north . . .," one of the kernel poems for the Milky Way story.

Einstein's first or "special" theory of relativity proved that measurements of space and time are relative to the observer. If two observers are moving at two different velocities, time and space will be different for both. Time is thus an important dimension of physical reality, a reality that in earlier Euclidian terms had included only the three dimensions of length, width, and height.

It was not Einstein, however, so much as the German mathematical physicist Hermann Minkowski who made the importance of the fourth dimension of time clear in his discussion of the "space time continuum." Ishiwara concentrated on Einstein's special theory of relativity in his *Principles* and included Minkowski's ideas on time. As evidence of Kenji's interest, we find him writing down Minkowski's name twice and underlining it in the upper margin of a manuscript.

Kenji was almost certainly familiar with Minkowski's theory, but there is much more involved in this passage from *Night of the Milky Way Railway* than a cool-headed assessment of the factor of time in the physical world. Part of the key to the understanding of Kenji's use of the term "fourth dimension" here lies in the writings of a Japanese Buddhist, Kimura Taiken, whose 1922 *Treatise on*

Early Buddhist Thought (Genshi bukkyō shisō ron) was read by Kenji. Kimura wrote the foreword of his book in Kiel, Germany. While he was clearly well versed in the work of the Rhys Davids and other British scholars of the Pali canon, he was also current with the contemporary ideas in science and philosophy that were the buzz of Europe. He drew upon that knowledge to explain Buddhist teachings.

Among many other topics, Kimura discusses early Buddhist teachings on death. No sooner does he introduce the subject—the dissolution of consciousness at the moment of death and the momentum of causality (karma) leading to continued existence and eventual rebirth—than he raises the problem of the different dimension or ground in which this existence after death might be carried out:

It is a mistake to take this basic life substance and think of it in terms of spatial existence wondering where and in what sort of form it might be wandering about. Somehow we always imagine matter as spatially existing. The substance of life, however, is not materially existing and thus we cannot treat it in spatial terms. . . . The basic form of transmigration in Buddhism is vastly different from the idea of half-material ghosts in popular thought. From the enlightened point of view of the Buddha, this life in its basic form would probably belong in the sphere of what we today call “the fourth dimension.”

Kimura's fourth dimension is much more suggestive (and at the same time much less scientific) than Minkowski's. While a theory of the possibility of unknown dimensions beyond the four known ones of three-dimensional space and time was eventually raised on the basis of Einstein's general theory of relativity, science has yet to discover and prove the existence of such dimensions. Kimura's provocative analogy, while ninety percent religion and philosophy and only ten percent science, was exactly the sort of inspiration Kenji needed as he pushed himself to

imagine a realm that could allow passage to the departed soul.

The bird catcher's comment that the fourth dimension of the galactic railway is "imperfect and illusory" is grounded in Buddhist sensibilities. According to Buddhist teaching, all existence is illusory. It is only a fully enlightened mind that realizes the emptiness of reality. To the extent that characters, author, and readers alike are unenlightened, the world they perceive, no matter what its dimensions or subatomic composition, is illusory.

The bird catcher's slighting of the realm of the railway as "imperfect and illusory" also reflects traditional Buddhist cosmology described in such long and difficult works as the *Abhidharmakośa* (in Japanese, *Kusharon*), a text Kenji almost certainly consulted. This cosmology sees the entire universe, both visible and invisible, as ranked by increasing degrees of immateriality and perfection. As one proceeds progressively up higher rungs within our own lowest realm of the *kāmadhātu*, life becomes more refined. Instead of coarse food, for example, beings of the upper realms sustain themselves by "eating smells," while sexual desire is appeased by laughter or the mere exchange of glances. Such realms, far more lovely than our own gross world here on earth, are nevertheless imperfect when compared to the immaterial and unimaginable status of the highest *ârupadhātu* world.

Aquila Station (p. 53)

The constellation Aquila (the Eagle) lies within the Milky Way. It contains the bright star Altair, a fixture in the summer sky and the subject of the Tanabata myth. The "three small, bluish-white triangular markers" that Campanella finds on his map may represent Altair flanked by the less bright Beta and Gamma Aquilae. The quiet station in the cornfields that appears later once the woods of Lyra are passed is most probably Aquila Station.

The Ship That Hit an Iceberg and Sank (p. 56)

The young man's account of tragedy at sea is clearly based on the story of the Titanic. The huge and "unsinkable" Titanic struck an iceberg and went down in the cold north Atlantic on the night of April 14, 1912. Fifteen hundred passengers lost their lives. Kenji was fifteen when the dramatic story made headlines in Japan. What seems to have intrigued him most about the accounts were the tales of self-sacrifice and expression of religious faith. In 1925, thirteen years after the Titanic sinking, he mentioned the event in a poem. Standing at the school window, the poet hears, but cannot see, his students say goodbye to him as they leave the school grounds through a sea of winter ground fog and he reflects that the setting turns him and his fellow teachers into "shams of the sad, heroic passengers/ of the Titanic standing on the decks/ and singing 'Nearer My God to Thee.' "

In the youth's story, too, self-sacrifice and faith evinced by the singing of hymns are most evident. Searching for representatives of heaven-bound souls from a Christian point of view, Kenji need look no further than the victims of the Titanic disaster.

What Looked Like Hazy Beacon Fires (p. 58)

These beacon fires reappear and become something of a regular, although sporadic, feature of the celestial landscape. They are as puzzling as the much more numerous triangular markers with which they appear. It seems possible that Kenji used beacon fires to represent stellar nebulae, just as, throughout his story, he consistently used triangular markers for stars.

This guess as to the metaphoric value of the strange beacon fires is borne out by a passage from the final section of an earlier version of *Night of the Milky Way Railway*. In the passage in question Giovanni is at the very southern limit of the sky. The end of his galactic journey is near at hand:

At that moment from a spot beyond the pitch-black horizon a beacon fire shot upward burning with the brightness of midday and filling the railway carriage with light. The beacon continued to burn, reaching higher and higher until it grazed the sky. . . . The Magellanic nebula! Yes, for my sake, for my mother's sake, for Campanella's sake, for the sake of everyone, I certainly will search for the really true happiness. . . . Giovanni stood gazing at the Magellanic nebula, his face tense with resolve. . . . The one with supreme happiness, for that one's sake . . .

There are two Magellanic nebulae, a larger one and a smaller one. Both belong to the skies above the South Pole and are never visible from northern latitudes. They are named after the great Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan, whose crew made note of them in their famous circumnavigation of the globe in the early sixteenth century. It seems most reasonable to assume that Kenji had the larger Magellanic nebula in mind when he wrote this passage, but it is just possible he intended to refer to both.

From Earth the Magellanic nebulae look like pieces torn from the Milky Way. In a sense, that is just what they are: irregular galaxies composed of stars and interstellar gases that are our nearest galactic neighbors. They are close enough to exert gravitational influence. Today we know that even the largest of the two nebulae is less than one-third the size of our home galaxy, but that was not necessarily the view in Kenji's day. In the nineteenth century the British astronomer Sir John Frederick William Herschel, using a telescope mounted in Cape Town, South Africa, counted within the Larger Magellanic nebula 582 independent stars, 46 star clusters, and 291 independent nebulae. In size and richness it was considered the greatest object in the skies and a worthy rival to our own Milky Way.

In the "Background to the Story" we will discuss some of the significance stellar nebulae held for Kenji, and how, in the third rough draft of "In the Starry Sky . . .," he had consciously linked them to the myriad Buddha worlds that are a feature of

traditional Mahayana Buddhist, especially Avatamsaka, cosmology. It will be helpful to keep these associations in mind as we consider these curious fires that blaze against the deep purple sky of Kenji's imaginary world.

Apples and Agriculture (p. 59)

In the poem "Aomori Elegy," when the poet, Kenji, sees that his sister is dying, he tries to direct her fading consciousness to all that is best and highest in life by calling out, among other things, the word "apple." Later in the same poem the beautiful predawn clouds saturated with moonlight emit "a more and more mysterious scent of apples." Clearly, apples and their scent held a heavenly, almost sacred, meaning for Kenji. As readers we have the right to ask why.

Setting aside the potentially intriguing question of shape, we can find part of the answer to the apple's appeal if we consider the kind of food it provides. Growing naturally on trees, the apple, at least ideally, needs no cultivation and occasions no loss of life in the eating; it nourishes the eater without cost of human labor or loss to animal or plant. For someone seeking escape from the built-in wrongdoing of the food chain, fruit such as the apple represented a nearly ideal food. In his story Kenji puts the finishing touches on nature's near perfection by having the unused peel of the apple vanish before reaching the ground.

Behind this idealization of the apple lies a Buddhist understanding of the nature of nourishment and agriculture. According to the classic Buddhist myth of the origins of our world, the first men were wonderfully ethereal beings who moved by air and had "joy for food." One of these beings discovered that the ground could be eaten as "ground juice" and taught the practice to the others. The eating of "ground juice" weighed down the light-as-air bodies of these early people, prompting them to eat progres-

sively coarser foods until, eventually, the practice gave rise to agriculture and the idea of possessing and storing food. After that, agriculture in turn became more and more laborious and time-consuming.

The lighthouse keeper's description of agriculture in the mysterious realm of the Milky Way quite properly reverses this process so that further progress along the railway leads to progressively more refined and less agricultural modes of sustenance. In this way Kenji preserves the canonically correct hierarchical ordering of his Buddhistic other-world.

The Woods with an Enormously Tall Triangular Marker (p. 60)

The woods represent the constellation Lyra (the Lyre) lying on the opposite bank of the Milky Way from Aquila. The enormously tall triangular marker within Lyra is the very bright star Vega, Altair's partner according to the Tanabata myth. Vega is an exceptionally bright star, the fifth brightest in our heavens. Since Vega is bluish-green, it is just possible that "the blue star of Lyra" that heralded Giovanni's entrance to the Milky Way world in chapter five is one and the same with this bright star of the Tanabata myth.

Association with the lyre undoubtedly accounts for the uncannily beautiful music that flows from the woods as the children pass this constellation. The olives and radiant peacocks, however, are more elusive.

The Magpies (p. 60)

As we noted earlier, magpies play an important role in some versions of the Tanabata myth by serving as a floating bridge across the heavenly river. While the romantic element in the Tanabata legend is of only slight importance to Kenji in telling

his story, he is careful to mention the magpies in connection with Lyra and its bright hallmark, Vega.

“The New World Symphony” (p. 64)

Kenji’s home province of Iwate was sometimes called the Tibet of Japan, an epithet meant to indicate its remoteness, poverty, and coldness. While prosperity has not overlooked Iwate as Japan’s fortunes continue to rise in the postwar era, life in Kenji’s time was hard indeed. This was especially true for the small-scale farmers who frequently faced starvation in the recurring famines of the early twentieth century. The years 1902, 1905, 1913, 1924, and 1927 all saw radically poor harvests in Iwate. In his attempts to aid the rural poor and share their life, Kenji was frustrated by the hopelessness of working land that would not turn abundant despite the labor lavished upon it:

For two thousand years now
people have been working hard
trying to make the ground flat
and the land there uniformly green in summer
golden in fall
why hasn’t our soil yet of its own accord
brought forth an indigo horizon
flower and fruit . . .

To one who worked the stubborn Iwate soil as Kenji did, stories of the rich farmlands of North America must have had enormous appeal, recalling the lost Buddhist golden age when the earth virtually yielded abundance of its own accord. Interestingly, in a memo he wrote to himself regarding *Night of the Milky Way Railway*, Kenji commented that he should have “a fresh new world appear to a public spirited person for whom land reclamation had not been a success.”

Dvořák's famous "New World Symphony" (no. 9 in E minor) was completed in 1893 after the composer spent two summers among Czech immigrants in Iowa. The symphony, with its evocations of black spirituals and Indian rhythms, celebrates the ideal of America as a land of promise and rural plenty. As such, it quite properly has a place among the rich cornfields and rolling plains of Kenji's magical Milky Way.

The Indian (p. 65)

Most readers of *Night of the Milky Way Railway* who know their stars would probably agree with Kusaka Hideaki that Kenji's Indian represents in some fashion the zodiacal constellation Sagittarius (the Archer). While in the Greek tradition Sagittarius was a centaur poised with drawn bow, Kenji's American theme for this region of the Milky Way calls for a motif from the New World. In this regard it is important to note that Dvořák wrote the celebrated horn theme of the second movement of his "New World Symphony" (the melodic largo movement so often mistaken for a folk song) as a response to the section "Hiawatha's Wooing" in Longfellow's epic poem, "Hiawatha." It is possible that Kenji was aware of this since it was mentioned in the material accompanying a Columbia release in 1928.

Regardless of whether Kenji's American Sagittarius is a celestial Hiawatha or no, it is significant that he never expressly shoots the crane that falls into his hands. Every line of Kenji's description here seems intended to transform the act of hunting into bloodless ritual. The Indian does not chase his prey but half-dances across the open fields. He does not aim his bow toward the bird but toward the sky itself. Nowhere does Kenji tell us that the Indian actually releases an arrow; rather, the crane seems to come fluttering down of its own accord. If this is the New World, it is the New World transposed to the fourth dimen-

sion; as with the bird catcher episode, the harsh laws that govern the giving and taking of life have been eased.

The Twin Stars (p. 67)

Talk of twins in connection with stars will undoubtedly call to mind Gemini, but it is much more likely that Kenji was thinking of two greenish stars near the tip of the barbed tail of the constellation Scorpio (the Scorpion). These two stars, Lambda and Upsilon Scorpii, are called the “brother stars” in Japanese tradition. Legend has it that they were once chased by a demon and escaped by clinging to the net of heaven (Scorpio) and hauling themselves into the sky.

In this episode of *Night of the Milky Way Railway*, Kenji cleverly refers to his own story “The Twin Stars,” a trick of intertextuality he sometimes permitted himself. The story the little boy blurts out in snatches over the protest of his more decorous sister, is the same Kenji tells in his early children’s tale. Two twin stars, Pose and Chunse, live happily side by side in two crystal palaces in the sky. A series of misadventures finds them flung from a comet’s tail down the sluice gate of the river of heaven to the sea. After a run-in with some nasty-tempered starfish who claim the two as low-ranking members of their own tribe, the twin stars manage to return to their happy home in the sky.

While the Chunse and Pose of “The Twin Stars” are undeniably close, holding a clear mutual affection for one another, there is nothing about the tale to indicate that they are intended to be brother and sister. Their gender is unspecified and seemingly of little consequence. The significance of their close bond and the thought that it might represent Kenji’s reflection on brother and sisterly love is raised only by reading this story in conjunction with another, later piece, “The Fourth Letter” (Tegami yon).

“The Fourth Letter” was most likely written and distributed in mimeograph form in 1924, well over a year after Kenji’s sister Toshiko had died. In an unmistakable way, “The Fourth Letter” tells the story of his sister’s death and Kenji’s own deep mourning for her. In the story, the sister bears the name Pose while her unruly older brother is Chunse. Chunse is not particularly kind to his sister while she is alive and well, but when she sickens and dies he is beside himself with grief. The coincidence of the names suggests that Kenji’s affection for his sister might have served as the inspiration for the earlier “Twin Stars.”

It is significant, then, that it is the little brother and sister, quarrelsome though they are, who tell the story of the twin stars in *Night of the Milky Way Railway*. For all their bickering, Tadashi belongs with Kaoru just as Chunse belongs with Pose and Kenji with Toshiko. Through his artful telling of the tale, Kenji gently reminds us of one of the governing passions behind his fantasy of journey and stars.

The Fire of Scorpio (p. 68)

According to Kenji’s cousin and boyhood friend, Seki Tokuya, Scorpio was Kenji’s favorite among the many constellations. Following the information given in a contemporary handbook on astronomy, Kenji knew that the bright red star, Antares (Alpha Scorpii), at the scorpion’s heart was called “the great fire” in Chinese tradition. In *Night of the Milky Way Railway* he uses this “great fire” to tell a tale of remorse and sacrifice.

Kaoru’s story, while apparently Kenji’s own invention, has the tone and texture of a Jataka tale; the Jataka tales are ancient Indian legends that recount the heroic past lives of the Buddha before he was born into the world as Sakyamuni. In the Jataka tales the Buddha is frequently an animal—a monkey, an elephant, a rabbit, or some other beast. Most often he sacrifices his own life for the good of others.

It is important to note in Kaoru's tale that the scorpion has reason for remorse. Following his instincts as a scorpion and the natural imperative to eat in order to survive, he is responsible for the death of countless small insects; he is guilty by reason of participation in the food chain. The wish that sends him into incandescent glory is a desire to run counter to that imperative, to resist the natural impulse to escape, and turn willingly from eater to eaten. While Jataka-like in nature, the story of the scorpion nevertheless bears Kenji's distinctive mark of concern for the dilemma of existence. As the little train continues down the southern sky, the fire of the scorpion seems a signal to Giovanni of both trials and solutions to come.

The Southern Cross (p. 71)

Kenji is careful to make of this bright constellation of the southern skies a simple disembarkation point for the Christian heaven, consigning all details about the ultimate destination of Giovanni and Campanella's young friends to conjecture and silvery mist.

The Christian scene he does depict with its magnificent cross, trumpet call, rows of kneeling faithful, and white-robed figure was probably influenced by the contact he had with Christianity through missionaries in nearby Morioka. From the evidence of his own writings and comments of contemporaries, we know that Kenji was acquainted with the Reverend Henry Tapping, an American minister who was pastor of the Baptist church in Morioka from 1901 to 1920. It seems likely that Kenji attended bible school sessions with Tapping while he was a student at the Morioka Higher Agricultural School. Kenji also mentions the name of a French Catholic missionary, Fr. Henri Puget, who was associated with the Catholic church in Morioka from 1903 to 1922. While the elderly Reverend Tapping was said to be rather

stern and serious by nature, Fr. Puget was purportedly a more cosmopolitan spirit, fond of antiques and good sake. Undoubtedly both left their own independent impression on the writer.

The Electric Squirrels (p. 74)

In his November 22, 1922, poem “Pine Needles” (Matsu no hari), Kenji addresses his sister as she lies dying. Startled by her response to some pine boughs he has cut and brought to her, he exclaims, “Like a bird, like a squirrel you longed for the woods. . . .” In the many poems of mourning that followed her death, Kenji shifted the simile to metaphor and even to fact, discovering in the birds and squirrels and other woodland creatures he encountered a sense of the presence of his dead sister. Of all his elegies, “The White Birds” best illustrates this act of recovery and association.

It would be too intrusive with so little context to insist that the charming squirrel faces that blink on and off in the misty branches by the side of the railroad represent in any specific way an allusion to the author’s dead sister, yet some association with the realm of departed spirits seems justified. Perhaps, as Amazawa suggests, the squirrels are simply Kenji’s own version of angels, messengers from another realm whose greeting is intuited but not fully understood.

The Coal Sack in the Sky (p. 75)

The Coal Sack is a prominent feature of the night sky for those living in the Southern Hemisphere. It is a black nebula lying between the bright stars of the Southern Cross and the legs of the constellation Centaurus. The utter blackness of the Coal Sack blots out the brightness of the Milky Way which is otherwise brilliant in that part of the sky. The contrast must be striking.

Today we know that a black nebula is black because its abundant interstellar dust absorbs the light of the stars beyond it. That was not the thinking in Kenji's day, however, when black nebulae such as the Coal Sack were generally considered to be windows of the Milky Way from which the universe outside the galaxy could be glimpsed. The view these windows seemed to afford, opening as they did in the very heart of the galaxy, was dark and empty indeed. Try as he may, Giovanni can see nothing in the dark depths of the hole; as far as he knows, the universe beyond the galaxy is a perfect vacuum.

It is helpful to note that Kenji had earlier explored the idea that the Milky Way might have a hole within it, a sort of viewing window to the black universe beyond, in the third rough draft of "In the starry sky...." The passage in question occurs immediately prior to the one concerning nebulae and Buddha worlds quoted earlier in the background to the story:

I search the sky like a mad man—
where could it be
that terrible window of the Milky Way
the black wound left behind
after a single star slid down the Milky Way
and its vapor
which seemed to spread endlessly outward, had vanished . . .

The most curious thing about the passage is the poet's own enthusiasm. Why should he search the sky "like a mad man"? Surely, it is because he is frantically, unbearably eager to see this "terrible" sight. Giovanni, too, in *Night of the Milky Way Railway* seems somehow attracted to the Coal Sack; even as his heart freezes with fear at the sight of the pitch-black hole, he strains his eyes to peer into its depths.

The True Happiness of Everyone (p. 76)

Mahayana, or Northern, Buddhism has given the world the concept of the Bodhisattva, one who seeks enlightenment not only for personal benefit, but for the sake of all sentient beings. The Bodhisattva vow is an oath to persevere on the spiritual path for the sake of everyone's ultimate good. The dying scorpion makes something very close to a Bodhisattva vow when he prays that in his next life his body might be used "for the true happiness of everyone." Giovanni, confronted with the Coal Sack and the vision of emptiness and oblivion it holds, responds as a Bodhisattva.

The universal nature of Giovanni's quest takes on particular significance when considered against the backdrop of Kenji's personal mourning for his sister. In the early days of his grief, Kenji the writer warned himself in his poems and stories that it was wrong to be concerned exclusively with Toshiko's future happiness. In weaning himself away from a selfish preoccupation with his sister, Kenji made use of another Buddhist doctrine, that of reincarnation. Buddhist teachings on reincarnation encourage a feeling of compassion toward others by emphasizing that, given the long span of past time and past lives already elapsed, all of us were at one time related to each other. Thus, it is wrong to kill a bothersome fly because in some past life the lowly fly might have been our loving mother. We should resist venting our anger upon a so-called enemy because in some past life that same enemy might have been a beloved brother or sister.

We find this doctrine at work at the close of an earlier version of *Night of the Milky Way Railway*. Here Giovanni, grieving for the departed Campanella, is told by a wise man with a pale face that

everyone is Campanella. Anyone you chance to meet, whoever they might be, is someone with whom you have already shared a journey

any number of times, eating apples together and riding on trains. It is wisest, therefore, to do as you thought earlier and seek the best happiness of all people, going there as quickly as possible together. Only in that way is it really possible for you to go on forever with Campanella.

There is a passage uncannily similar to this one at the close of Kenji's "The Fourth Letter" when Chunse, who very much represents Kenji's point of view in the story, reflects on his sister, Pose's, death:

It is useless for Chunse to ask after Pose. Why? Because all the children, all the people working in the fields, all the people eating apples in the train, and all the singing birds and songless birds, all the fishes, green ones and black ones alike, all the animals even all the insects, all of them were brother and sister to one another since ancient times.

For Chunse and Giovanni alike, the solution to the pain and introversion of personal grief is a more universal point of view and a keenly felt sense of the interrelated nature of all existence.

A Boy Fell in the River (p. 78)

Onda Itsuo has documented at some length the surprisingly negative connotation the idea of river has in Kenji's work. For Kenji, the word river meant above all the broad Kitakami that flows near his hometown of Hanamaki. Kenji was sensitive to the restlessness of that river's motion, its customary muddy color, and its intimate involvement with the workaday world of human affairs. To him the Kitakami stood in utter contrast to the sense of purity, radiance, and selflessness he so often sought as an ideal. We already encountered something of Kenji's characteristic feeling toward rivers in "Elegiac Blue" where the Kitakami is

... a thing which, ceaselessly scheming, ceaselessly grieving
ceaselessly continuing in poverty
flows on forever . . .

Rivers for Kenji, however, were not simply emblems of the less than lovely traits of human society. They were also intimately associated in his mind with the idea of death, most especially, death by drowning. As early as 1918, the year of his graduation from the School of Agriculture and Forestry, Kenji wrote the disturbing "Blue People in the Water's Flow" (*Aobito no nagare*), a series of tanka (traditional verses) in which he imagines a morbid struggle between dead and living swimmers in a river. The surreal swimmers grab and even bite at one another as the current carries them along.

Kenji's biographer, Horio Sei'ichi, feels that Kenji was deeply affected in the summer of his second year in elementary school when a young neighbor his own age drowned, not in the Kitakami but in its tributary, the Toyozawa. It is possible that Kenji used his childhood memories of the nighttime search for the body (it was discovered the following day) in writing the final scene in *Night of the Milky Way Railway*. Certainly the visual detail and convincing spatial organization of the scene suggest a basis in personal experience.

Whatever the roots in Kenji's life might be, in the final scene we encounter the unmistakable fear and tension of a river accident. We experience Campanella's disappearance and probable death in the river as a tragedy, the unnecessary and painful loss of a young life. It is only when Campanella's this-worldly death is set in the context of his journey down the beautiful river of heaven overhead that it begins to take on a quality of hope and inspiration. Thinking of his friend, not in the river that flows near at hand but at the far "end of that Milky Way," Giovanni's mood seems curiously light-hearted. Indeed, in the final sentence of the story, he seems to put grief aside entirely as he rushes home to tell his mother the good news of his father's impending return.

Background to the Story

Night of the Milky Way Railway (*Ginga tetsudō no yoru* in Japanese) is the best-loved and best-known of Miyazawa Kenji's many stories. Unpublished during his lifetime, it was first introduced to the world in 1934, the year after his death, when a rushed effort was made to bring out a first edition of the collected works of this newly discovered writer. Almost immediately the story attracted fans and devotees. Never before had a Japanese writer attempted a fantasy of such sustained intensity. Here, whimsy combined with scientific fact and knowledge of Buddhist scriptures to create a story of almost visionary power.

Since 1934 *Night of the Milky Way Railway* has remained perennially popular in Japan—discussed in the lecture hall, published and republished as an illustrated book for children, performed on stage, rendered into comics and film. Hooked on the tale as children, readers return to it, still wide-eyed and expectant, as adults. But for all of its enduring popularity and charm, *Night of the Milky Way Railway* remains a difficult book. Difficult, that is, to read well.

Part of the challenge lies in the vast knowledge of Buddhist scriptures and turn-of-the-century science that Kenji brought to the telling of his story. Astronomy and, indeed, the whole of Western science have altered greatly in the more than sixty years since Kenji first began to write his tale. As English readers in the

late twentieth century we are apt to be only slightly aware of these changes and, in most cases, even less aware of Kenji's faith. In other words, we are likely to be far removed from the assumptions and images that govern Kenji's rich imaginary world. To catch everything the story has to say, we need to understand what it was like to be a Buddhist and turn-of-the-century scientist; we need to become contemporaries of the author.

This is not as demanding a task as it might first seem, and it is certainly well worth the effort. In writing *Night of the Milky Way Railway* Kenji was dealing with topics of the utmost importance—love, death, hope, life itself. Perhaps as a consequence, he buried much of the meaning of *Night of the Milky Way Railway* below its surface. If we know what specific words actually meant to Kenji, we have what we need to do a little digging and the tools to discover some startling messages.

Anyone can join in the search for Kenji's hidden galactic treasure by exploring the "Reader's Guide" above. In writing the commentaries that comprise the guide, I have sought not to read the text for the readers, leading them by the hand from symbol to significance, but rather to supply sufficient context to allow an informed reading, or, in this case an informed digging, to take place. The work and the discoveries must all be the reader's own.

Knowing what Kenji had in mind when he used certain terms and images will not, however, tell us all we really need in order to read *Night of the Milky Way Railway* well. Part of the reason Kenji as an author tended to be less than direct, even covert, about the tale's subject matter is that it touched upon his own life in a significantly personal way. To find out why this story burns at its core with a white-hot intensity, we must blaspheme against fifty years of literary criticism and make an attempt to link the tale to its teller. In the pages that follow, we will dip into Kenji's biography, paying particular attention to his development as a

writer, his bond with his sister, and, above all, to the events in his life that preceded and prompted the writing of *Night of the Milky Way Railway*.

Buddhism and Second-Hand Clothes— The Genesis of a Writer

Kenji was born in 1896 in the provincial city of Hanamaki in Japan's northern prefecture of Iwate. He died thirty-seven years later in the same country town. He was the eldest son in a family that ran a prosperous business in second-hand clothing. Their customers came not from Hanamaki but from the farming communities in the surrounding countryside. Since the clientele was generally poor, in addition to selling purchased stock, the Miyazawa store functioned as a pawn shop where financially hard-pressed farmers could hawk their clothes in return for badly needed cash. As a boy Kenji showed a dislike for the more painful and unsavory side of this pawn shop trade and was rebuked by his father for offering payments to clients so generous that they amounted to charity. At the same time, he clearly recognized that as eldest son, he would be expected to carry on the family trade as an adult. This conflict between his own inclinations and what was expected of him as a family member encouraged a spirit of quiet rebelliousness against paternal authority. At the same time it fostered a sense of guilt-laden concern about the plight of the rural poor. Both responses were deeply felt and eventually left a mark upon his writing, including *Night of the Milky Way Railway*.

Kenji's parents were members of the Shin Buddhist sect. Even while the family business had its harsher aspects, the household itself was markedly pious and devout. Shin Buddhism stresses faith in the saving powers of Amida Buddha and teaches that those with faith will, after death, be reborn in Amida's Pure Land, the Western paradise. We know that Kenji was exposed to

Shin pietistic texts as a very young child and that in the summer of his fifth year of elementary school he accompanied his father and other family members on the first of a series of annual religious retreats held at Ōzawa in the mountains near his home.

Kenji was clearly receptive to this childhood religious instruction. In 1912, away from home as a boarder in the middle school at Morioka, he wrote to his father that he was prepared to lay down his life for the Buddha and that he felt the Buddha's presence like a shadow following him and protecting him so that he had nothing to fear.

It is important to keep in mind Kenji's early devotion to Amida (his "Buddha" in the letter) in considering his conversion to the Nichiren faith that followed his middle-school years. In Nichiren Buddhism, faith is invested in the saving power of a particular text, the *Lotus Sutra*, or *Saddharmapundarīkasūtra* (Japanese: *Myōhō Renge Kyō*). Although there is ample room for personal devotion in Nichiren religion, greater emphasis is placed upon the true word and correct belief. Kenji's change of religion eventually led him to try to convert his family. While, with the possible exception of his sister Toshiko, he was unsuccessful, his challenge to the Miyazawa's traditional faith was the source of many heated arguments, especially with his father.

During 1914, at home and unhappy, Kenji began to study for the entrance exams of the Morioka Higher School of Agriculture and Forestry. He took the exams the following spring and passed at the very top of his class. How his father and the rest of the family felt about his entry into the agricultural school we do not know, but they did not prevent his enrolling. The Higher School in Morioka was run on a level equivalent to a college or technical institute in the United States today. It was the first school of agriculture established in Japan and enjoyed a national reputation. By entering the school, Kenji gave every indication that he was embarking on a career in agriculture. For reasons that were

largely his own doing, however, this promise of a career was only partially fulfilled. At Morioka, Kenji built upon his already considerable experience as a naturalist and acquired a fund of scientific knowledge that was to serve him well as a creative writer and was to give stories such as *Night of the Milky Way Railway* a unique sort of erudition.

Kenji spent five years as a student at the agricultural school. Upon graduation he served briefly as a researcher at the school, but, surprisingly, gave up the chance of more permanent employment that the position would ordinarily have led to in order to return to the family business. Kenji might have felt uncomfortable with any role that smacked of academic prestige and worldly success, but the decision to return home seemed designed to guarantee his own unhappiness. The years that followed saw a growing intensity in his Nichiren faith and practice, leading to repeated stormy arguments with his family. In January of 1921, no longer able to bear the situation, he left abruptly for Tokyo.

During the days of poverty and loneliness that followed, Kenji began to write. He had written some pieces before but now the trickle became a torrent; the poems and stories poured out. When he finally returned to Hanamaki in September of the same year he carried with him a suitcase filled with manuscripts. To some extent Kenji's discovery of himself as a writer solved the personal crisis in his life. A few months later in November he accepted a teaching position in the newly formed agricultural school in Hanamaki and, with a steady income at last, was able to settle down peacefully at home. Kenji's students in the school came from the poor farming villages outside of Hanamaki. They were exactly the sort of people he wanted most to serve. At ease with himself and his world for the time being, he was able to devote an astonishing amount of time and energy to his writing, even though he was teaching.

Toshiko—The Genesis of a Story

While Kenji's Buddhist faith, training as an agricultural scientist, and exceptional sensitivity toward the rural poor are important factors to keep in mind, they do not tell us all we need to know before setting about to explore *Night of the Milky Way Railway*. As indicated above, one of the most important factors to consider in the story of this tale's own telling is the nature and strength of Kenji's bond with his sister.

Toshiko was two years younger than her brother. They were the eldest among five children. While little is known of their childhood together, the reports we do have suggest that they were unusually close and enjoyed one another's company.

At thirteen Toshiko completed elementary school and enrolled in the new Girls' High School in Hanamaki. Unlike Kenji, who was a rather erratic student at the time, diverted by subjects outside the curriculum, Toshiko produced near flawless work and graduated at the head of her class. While the family had balked at the idea of allowing Kenji to go outside the prefecture for his education, they agreed to send their talented daughter to Tokyo after graduation from the Girls' High School. In the spring of 1915, at the age of seventeen, Toshiko entered the Japan Women's Academy, a premier institution, one of only a few in its day offering the opportunity for higher education to women.

In January of 1918, during her final year at the Women's Academy, Toshiko became seriously ill; both her mother and her brother made the trip from Hanamaki to look after her in the hospital. Kenji's devoted attention to his sister during her two-month hospital stay is legendary. He wrote home at least once each day, sometimes twice, reporting on her condition. Although Toshiko's fever was originally diagnosed as typhus, the expected bacilli were not found and the diagnosis was revised to "tena-

cious influenza.'" In fact, the two months of fever in Tokyo almost certainly marked the onset of tuberculosis.

Toshiko's grades at the academy were such that she was granted her diploma even though she was unable to complete her final term. Earlier, she had passed a difficult English test that qualified her as a teacher of the language. After her return to Hanamaki and a period of convalescence, she began work as an English and home economics teacher at her alma mater, the Girls' High School.

Toshiko's status as a consumptive essentially ruled out any prospect of marriage. She turned to her work as a source of fulfillment but her disease soon sapped her strength. She began teaching in September of 1920. In April of the following year, she became ill in Tokyo during a trip to recruit new teachers for her school. After she returned to Hanamaki, she was unable to continue teaching and became an invalid in her parents' house. When her condition took a turn for the worse at the end of the summer, word was sent to Kenji, who was then leading his independent life in Tokyo. Kenji promptly returned home to be with his sister, his suitcase full of manuscripts under his arm.

The Miyazawas nursed Toshiko for over a year and a half before she died. In July of 1922, in order to escape the oppressive heat in town, she was moved to the family's second home on the outskirts of Hanamaki in Shimaneko-sakura (now part of Hanamaki City). This was the house that would later serve as Kenji's homebase during the farming years that followed his withdrawal from teaching.

By October the weather had turned cold and the roads had become difficult to travel. The family decided to move Toshiko back to the main house. Although she did not refuse, Toshiko was reluctant to leave Shimaneko-sakura, saying that she would soon die in the "cold, dark and unpleasant" Hanamaki house. She was tragically correct; she died on a bleak November day within a few weeks of her return.

Her death itself was a traumatic event for Kenji. He had viewed his sister as a companion in religion if only because she had obligingly joined him at times in his devotions. Now, in the days before her death, as she grew progressively weaker, he sought desperately to confirm and strengthen her faith. To the family's distress, he would chant *Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō* in his loud, clear voice by her bedside, making her join her hands and accompany him in the familiar Nichiren mantra. As death approached, however, his chanting stopped and he surrendered to the anguish and terror of the event.

Kenji's grief was profound. Tragic as it was, however, Toshiko's death proved a stimulus for Kenji as a writer, generating new themes that he was to handle with greater emotional intensity. The most immediate impact was on his poetry, which includes three poems dated November 22, 1922, the day of Toshiko's death. Under the section title "Voiceless Lament," he uses a form of lyric direct address that makes us privy to the poet's last words to his sister on the morning of her death—not the actual words, but the words he cannot speak, the ones that stay locked inside him as he watches her die:

Before the day ends you will depart for some distant place, my sister
Are you really going to go alone
Ask me to go with you
crying, ask me, please . . .

The poet's voice is helpless, childlike, and pleading. Again and again he equates death with departure. It is difficult to think of a poet who has written about the event of an actual death with greater honesty or such unguarded expression of pain.

The emotional catharsis of Toshiko's death and the three poems of November 22 were followed by a period of silence. When the poetry starts again in May of the following year (1923), we find Kenji in the woods, not lost in memories but,

rather, startled by a sudden, furtive sense of encounter with his dead sister. Toshiko might have gone "to some distant place," but Kenji, battling the more rational side of his nature, experiences a wistful sense of contact with her:

Two large white birds
fly through the damp morning sunlight
calling to each other with sad piercing cries
They are my sister
my dead sister
Because their brother has come they cry so sorrowfully . . .

A concern for the well-being of his sister after death, and the sense that if he looked hard enough he might find her, prompted Kenji to make a remarkable journey the following August. Ostensibly, he set out on this northbound trip by train and ferry to the island of Sakhalin (then under Japanese rule and called Karafuto) in an effort to secure positions of employment for some of his students at the agricultural school. As suggested by the series of elegies he wrote about the journey, however, his trip included the much more personal motive of "a quest for the whereabouts of his beloved sister, Toshiko." Throughout these haunting poems Toshiko's image floats like a double exposure over the constantly changing background

Kenji's quest was not ultimately successful. Desperate as he was to know her whereabouts in death and to reassure himself that all was well, Toshiko as a presence near at hand eluded him. Reluctantly, he reached the conclusion that whatever existence she might possess was in a space so utterly different from the field of his mundane existence as to be absolutely inaccessible. His sister had gone very far away indeed:

Koma Peak, Koma Peak
stands with its head covered in dark metallic clouds
Toshiko may be hidden

within those pitch black clouds

Although time and again the intellect tries to instruct,
my loneliness will not heal

A phenomenon that was with me until now
shifts to a different space I cannot feel—

That, truly, is an event of great loneliness

(We call that loneliness “death”)

Even if in that different glittering space

Toshiko might be smiling quietly
my heart twisted by grief

cannot give up thinking of a Toshiko hidden somewhere

As a Mahayana Buddhist, Kenji was inclined to recognize the basic equality and interrelationship of all sentient beings. He felt that his concern should be for the ultimate enlightenment and happiness of everyone. In the harsh words of the closing passage of “Aomori Elegy” he warned himself that it was “forbidden to pray for one person alone.” In the months and years following his trip to Sakhalin, Kenji managed to pull himself away from a preoccupation with the thought of Toshiko’s existence in death. This universalizing of his mourning to include a concern for all beings clearly had a therapeutic effect upon him. It is difficult to imagine anyone able to sustain the intensity of grief in the “Voiceless Lament” poems or the summer elegies without risk of psychological harm. Yet even while Toshiko sank beneath the conscious surface of his poetry, Kenji’s imagination continued to circle around the one faint hope he had allowed himself: that his sister existed in some different space or world utterly beyond his ken.

In contemplating this different space beyond his knowing, Kenji’s thoughts flowed characteristically in two directions. Simultaneously, and with no sense of contradiction, he thought of this other world both in terms of traditional Buddhist cosmology and in terms of the modern science of astronomy. Among the

scrawled, almost indecipherable drafts of a 1924 poem we find the following revealing passage:

Are they real or not
 and which ones are they, those several nebulae
 considered to be outside the Milky Way
 The wondrous shapes of the myriad Buddha worlds
 expounded by the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra in the Avatamsaka
 some take the shape of a lotus throne
 some are round, others flat
 some endure by the momentary will of the Enlightened One
 some by the deeds of sentient beings
 others endure by cause and effect—thus propounds the Bodhisattva
 are some of these perhaps nebulae
 visible from here . . .

The analogies between the traditional Buddhist world view (here represented by the teachings of the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra) and the cosmology of modern astronomy were no more lost on Kenji than on other twentieth-century authors familiar with both systems. But while the myriad Buddha worlds expounded by the Bodhisattva cannot be seen by ordinary, unenlightened beings, some of the other galaxies of our rich, starry universe are visible, given the proper instruments and knowledge with which to see them. The nebulae “outside the Milky Way” Kenji mentions in his poem are almost certainly other galaxies, the Andromeda nebula, for example, or the greater and lesser Magellanic nebulae of the southern skies. These are all large world systems beyond our own Milky Way. They were known in Kenji’s day and are visible, even with the naked eye, from Earth.

By superimposing the Buddhist universe on the night sky Kenji suddenly created for himself the irresistibly attractive possibility that he might glimpse a “different world.” Provided he possessed the necessary degree of faith, luck, and scientific expertise, it was just possible that in glimpsing an extragalactic

nebula he might also be seeing at one and the same moment the other space that was Toshiko's ultimate destination after death.

Mention of his sister was almost (but not quite) taboo for Kenji at this time. That she still lingered at the bottom of his thoughts, however, is clear from "Elegiac Blue," another remarkable poem belonging to the summer of 1924. This poem, too, is a nocturne and includes an extended reflection on the summer sky.

The title, "Elegiac Blue" (Kairōsei), is both beautiful (although untranslatable so) and important. The characters used to write the title mean literally "leek-dew-blue." Leek-dew is a reference to a Chinese literary metaphor for the ephemeralness of life; just as dew does not linger but rolls easily off the long, smooth blade of a leek, just so human life does not last long in our world. Because of its association with brevity, the term leek-dew took on the meaning of elegy from the T'ang period onward. It was Kenji's own invention to add the word "blue" to the term, creating a simultaneously synesthetic and allegorical title for his poem. Certainly, the allusion to elegy establishes a clear reference to the poems of August 1923, and to Kenji's quest for his lost sister.

"Elegiac Blue" was never subjected to Kenji's usual dose of repeated and thoroughgoing revision. Perhaps as a consequence it lacks a certain polish. Despite a few rough edges, however, it possesses an unmistakable and unique beauty. Because of its intimate connection with *Night of the Milky Way Railway*, both in its overall conception and in specific details, I quote it in full:

Setting the line of channel markers to bob nostalgically water,
moving through the divinely clear elegiac blue light
raising the lonely sound of its rushing
as all night long it flows toward the Southern Cross
Now in the coal black walnut groves along the bank
the silver molecules are crystallizing out

from the swollen, half-fused breaths of night

..... The channel markers cast beautiful shadows on the water
The waves scattering as they rebound off the Pliocene coast
at times toss up a faint phosphorescence

The bridge planks and the air suddenly turn bright—
there must be lightning coming from somewhere in the
drought-stricken sky

O water, this sadness that fills my breast

I cannot heal,
carry it to the distant Magellanic nebulae
Over there a red fishing fire flickers—
Scorpio crawls above thin clouds
..... a thing which, ceaselessly scheming, ceaselessly grieving
ceaselessly continuing in poverty
flows on forever

The railings above the big river on the starry night are rotted
Gazing at the bare remnants of twilight in the west
and the faint blood red agate
I listen to the quiet breathing of scales
..... channel markers, dreamlike, tugging at the heart

Women workers from the silk mill boasting fine voices
seem to laugh at me as they pass by singing
Two voices belonging to my dead sister
are in that group, I am sure of it

..... They are the voices of those women singing for all
they are worth
from slender, fragile throats

The space above the cryptomeria grove is growing light now
because the moon is about to rise from that spot

The birds raise a constant clamor
..... channel markers—dream soldiers

As lightning flashes again in the south
fish spurt out the odor of acetylene

The water like a projected image of the Milky Way flows on to the
horizon

Steel gray ring of sky
 What a good thing it is
 not knowing where the one I think of so tenderly
 went off to in that way

From the luminescence of the sky sadness rains down,
 the season when black birds fly sharply past
 A filmy pattern seen on trout in autumn
 spans the sky in several white bands

Kenji is standing on a bridge in the evening before the moon rises. He is facing south, watching the river flow to the horizon "like a projected image of the Milky Way" which is shining above. The boundaries between sky and water blur. As so often is the case in Kenji's poetry, he is suffering from an overpowering emotion that he does not explain. Here he is haunted by a mysterious sadness which he asks the water to carry away to the "distant Magellanic nebulae" of the southern sky. Mention of nebulae instantly sends up a red flag; we have already begun to understand the burden of hope and possibility the word bore for Kenji at this time. He does not tell us expressly, but we can guess that his sadness has something to do with Toshiko. Our suspicions are confirmed when he suddenly declares that he hears her voice (literally voices) among the singing mill women. By the time we reach his surprising statement that it is a "good thing" that he does not know where "the one he thinks of so tenderly" has gone, we might not be entirely convinced of his enthusiasm for the departure (after all, sadness continues to "rain down"), but we know without hesitation that he is speaking of Toshiko.

If Kenji's first response when Toshiko died was to travel north in search of her, his second, more considered response was to try a southern route. This time, his quest was not for the sake of his sister alone; he had long ago determined that his concern must be broadened to include an ardent identification with all life. Also, while previously he had chosen a very real train to carry him on

his search, he now preferred the flexibility and unlimited potential of his own imagination. In the summer of 1924, gazing southward at night from the bridge over the Kitakami River, Kenji found that the time had come to board the Milky Way Railway.

Other evidence we have corroborates the conclusion that Kenji's initial Milky Way journey began one warm summer night in 1924 at a time when he was still a teacher in the local agricultural school. This was clearly a period of enormous creative excitement. By 1925, however, Kenji's spirits had dampened considerably. When initial publications of some of his poems and stories failed to sell, he began to question his ambition to publish as well as his role as a writer. Also, he was beginning to develop a philosophy of peasant art and life that suggested that his real work lay not in the classroom but in the fields, working side by side with the rural poor. In the spring of 1926 he gave up his post at the Hanamaki agricultural school to begin farming land near the family house at Shimaneko-sakura.

Enormously busy with farming, housework, and writing, as well as with encouraging and advising the farmers in the surrounding villages, Kenji's health broke down in the summer of 1928. He never completely recovered and spent the greater part of the next five years, until his death from tuberculosis, as an invalid in his parents' house. We know that during this time, in 1932 and 1933, bed-ridden, apologetic toward his parents, and increasingly aware that he did not have long to live, Kenji turned once again to work on the story he had set aside. He created three new chapters for the beginning of *Night of the Milky Way Railway* and fashioned the tightly worked ending in which Campanella, in Kenji's own words, "meets his death." If Toshiko's elusive ghost haunts the original conception of *Night of the Milky Way Railway*, the shadow of Kenji's own death falls across its final editing.

Another Night of the Milky Way Railway

Soon after Miyazawa Kenji died in 1933, word began to spread around literary circles in Tokyo that this virtually unknown writer from the north of Japan had left behind a large cache of strikingly original unpublished works. Editors rushed to sort through the confusing welter of multiple drafts and unfinished manuscripts in the Miyazawa home to bring out a three-volume set of his collected writings by the following year. While our contemporary knowledge of Kenji's work tells us that the set was seriously incomplete, this 1934 edition was sufficient to establish Kenji's reputation as a major writer and confirmed the discovery of a self-made, almost secret talent. *Night of the Milky Way Railway* was first introduced to the world in the 1934 collected works. Kenji's manuscript of the story, however, was in such a confusing state that the editors mistakenly telescoped different drafts together, awkwardly inserting five pages that constitute the final passage of the tale near the beginning, and reversing two other critical episodes, causing a rupture in the sequence of events. By anyone's standards the story was in a jumble, but the sheer imagination and magic of the tale shone through the oddities and opacities of the disordered text. Interest in the story sent editors and family members back to the pile of manuscripts.

In part, the confusion in the original handling had sprung from

the false assumption that *Night of the Milky Way Railway* was one tale simply told. It remained for two poet-scholars, Amazawa Taijirō and Irisawa Yasuo, working in the late 1960s and 1970s, to reveal the full complexity of *Night of the Milky Way Railway*. What they discovered through patient, painstaking effort was not a single story but an ongoing process of narration, a story told, modified, and then told again. With each retelling the story changed. Above all, there was no final or definitive version; in the end, the ongoing process of narration had simply been cut short by the author's death.

This unconventional mode of composition was typical of Kenji's work in general and certainly consistent with his overall philosophy. While the bold confusion of the writing might seem felicitous to readers at home with late twentieth-century notions of the nonfinal, multifarious nature of literary events, to the original editors it was simply baffling; it took years for the complex, surprising nature of the body of texts labeled *Night of the Milky Way Railway* to become known.

Not everything that Kenji wrote under the title *Night of the Milky Way Railway* survives. Of the several more or less distinct versions that seem to have existed at some point, only two are sufficiently intact to be read as whole, independent stories. For convenience sake these have been dubbed the earlier and the later versions. The translation in the front of this book is of the later version. The earlier version, however, has an appeal of its own and merits an introduction. Certainly, the very different closing passage of the earlier version is worth noting and enjoying.

Readers of the later version are already familiar with the core of the earlier one. The two share over two-thirds of their central portion in common, with just slight editorial discrepancies here and there. Rather than reprint so much of what has already been read, we will simply provide the reader with translations of the

initial and closing passages where the dissimilarities between the two versions are more striking.

The first three chapters of the later version are not found in the earlier one. Here Kenji's tale opens with the chapter entitled "Night of the Centaurus Festival" and a view of Giovanni walking down the dark streets of the town on his way to fetch milk for his mother. While much of the storyline in the initial passages of the earlier version is familiar, there is a different emphasis here on the personalities and relationships of the central characters. Critics who have commented on the problem of Giovanni's extraordinary loneliness—and there have been many—have tended to cite lines from the opening of the earlier version to make their point.

The closing passage, on the other hand, is entirely unlike that of the later version. Here we meet the mysterious figure of Professor Bulcaniro who has his counterpart, the pale-faced man with a cello-like voice, in the otherworldly realm of the Milky Way. The comfort and instruction these two characters offer Giovanni invite a fresh reading and interpretation of the entire tale.

The Night of the Centaurus Festival

—*Hey, my shadow is gradually getting shorter. It's catching up with me. Pretty soon there'll hardly be anything left.*—

With his lips puckered in a lonely expression as though he were whistling, Giovanni glanced behind him at his shadow as he came down the sloping dark cedar-lined street toward the town.

At the bottom of the slope stood a large street lamp splendidly aglow. As Giovanni came down nearer and nearer to the light, his shadow, which had been trailing behind him like a long, dimly visible specter, quietly drew up beside him. Dark and sharply defined, it lifted its feet and swung its arms.

—I'm a locomotive on the narrow-gauge railway racing down a steep grade. I'm passing the street lamp now. Chooo, chooo! Look, now my shadow is a compass needle; it's spun round so that it's right in front of me.—

Engrossed in such thoughts, Giovanni passed with large strides beneath the street lamp. At that moment a small red-faced boy wearing a new shirt with a pointed collar came out of a dark side street on the other side of the lamp. He brushed lightly past Giovanni.

“Zanelli, where have you been?”

Before Giovanni had time to get the words out, the boy shouted from behind him, hurling the words like stones, “Hey Giovanni, that otter skin jacket is going to come from your dad!”

Giovanni felt his chest suddenly freeze. The air around him seemed to ring.

Giovanni was upset because word was that his father had gone to sea on a ship that caught sea otters and dolphins, a poaching vessel no less, and that he had caused an injury to somebody and was now in jail in some far-off lonely town beside the straits. That was why tonight, even though it was the evening of the gay Centaurus festival when everyone gathered in the square to sing the song of the circling stars together and float blue-green crow gourd lanterns on the river, Giovanni was not with them. Instead, he was dressed in his shabby everyday clothes and was on his way to a spot outside of town to fetch the milk that the delivery man had neglected to bring to his sick mother.

—Why does Zanelli say things like that to me when I don't do anything to him? My father isn't bad and in jail. Father just wouldn't do anything wrong like that. Last summer when he came back, I was surprised when I first saw him, but when he smiled and opened up his bags, wow, there were big boots made of salmon skin and a reindeer's horn. I was so happy, dancing around and shouting. I took the things to school and showed

them to everyone. The teacher said they were unusual. Even now they're in the specimen room. Zanelli's awful. He's got to be an idiot to say things like that.—

All sorts of thoughts raced through Giovanni's head as he made his way along the beautifully decorated streets, full of lanterns and tree boughs. A bright neon light was burning at the clock store. There was an owl whose eyes of red stone rolled round every second. Dazzling chains of platinum and gold, and rings set with various precious stones were on a slowly turning thick glass plate the color of the sea. Beyond, a bronze centaur was making its slow circular progress forward. In the middle of everything was a round black star map decorated with blue-green asparagus fronds.

—How nice it would be if I didn't have to leave home when it was still dark and deliver papers for two hours and then when I got home from school go out to the printer's and collect type. In the old days school was more interesting. No one could beat me at horse and rider or ball throwing. I always won. But now no one plays with me. I'm always alone.—

Even though Giovanni worried about his jacket being too tight in the shoulders, he puffed out his chest and swung his arms broadly as he made his way through the town. On this night of the Centaurus festival the town was lovely. The utterly clear air flowed along the streets and through the shops like water. The street lamps were all swathed in boughs of blue-black fir and oak. The six plane trees in front of the power company had been hung with tiny lights and the whole place had the appearance of a mermaid village. Children in crisp new clothes dashed happily about whistling the star song and shouting, "Centaurus, send the dew!" as they sent magnesium sparklers into showers of blue sparks. Giovanni, however, had once again let his head droop. With thoughts in sharp contrast to the gay scene nearby, he hurried off to the outskirts of town.

—I feel so sorry for Mother. Every day she worried a lot, but would still go out and work, weeding the cabbages and cutting oats. One night, her heart was bothering her so much that she woke me up and asked me to boil some water. Her breathing was faint and seemed painful and even the color of her lips had changed. I got up and all by myself set about madly stirring up the fire to boil water. I did all I could—I warmed her hands for her, put warm, moist towels on her chest and cooled her forehead—but Mother just said in a tired voice that that was enough and I could stop. I felt so terrible I could hardly stand it.—

Before long Giovanni arrived at a spot on the outskirts of the town where countless poplar trees floated up tall into the starry sky. He passed through the black gate of the dairy and stood in front of the darkened milk kitchen which smelled of cows. Pulling off his cap, he called out, "Good evening," but the house was hushed and still. No one seemed to be home.

He straightened his shoulders and shouted once again, "Hello, is anyone home?"

An old woman farmhand came from the side of the milk kitchen carrying a bucket.

"It's no use this evening," she said. "Nobody's home."

"The milk wasn't delivered to our house today," Giovanni said as brightly as he could. "So I came to get it."

"There's no more milk today. You'd better wait till tomorrow."

As the woman spoke she rubbed a spot beneath her reddened eye with a corner of her kimono and stared at Giovanni.

"My mother is sick. Couldn't you find a little milk?"

"There isn't any. I'm sorry." The woman seemed ready to go back in.

"All right, thanks."

Giovanni nodded and left the kitchen, but for some reason his eyes were filled with tears.

—If I just had one single silver coin today I could buy some

condensed milk somewhere and take it back home. I really wish I had some money. The green apples are ripe and out for sale now. Campanella really has it good. Just today he was flipping two silver coins out on the playing field.

Why wasn't I born like Campanella? He can even buy Staedtler colored pencils. He can buy anything at all. And then, he really is outstanding. He's tall and always smiling. The first year of school he didn't do much, but now he's number one, the head of the class. No one stands a chance of catching up with him. In arithmetic, even when we calculate percentages, he just cocks his head a second and he's got the answer. And he's so good at drawing pictures. When we did the sketch of the water wheel his was better than even an adult could have done. I'd really like to have Campanella for a friend. He never says bad things about people. Nobody thinks badly of Campanella. But Mother is waiting for me now at home. I'll go right back and even though I don't have any milk I'll give her a kiss and tell her about the owl decoration at the clock store.—

With these thoughts running busily through his head, Giovanni came to the intersection he had passed before. Just as he was about to turn the corner, he caught sight of a jumbled cluster of shadows and dim white shirts in front of the dry goods shop. Six or seven whistling and laughing schoolboys, each holding a crow gourd lantern, stood in a cluster. Their laughter and whistling had a familiar ring; they were Giovanni's classmates. Giovanni was startled and began to turn back, but he thought better of it, and headed up the street with a bright, determined air.

He was going to ask if they were on their way to the river but found the words sticking in his throat.

Just then Zanelli shouted out again, "Giovanni, an otter skin jacket is going to come for you!"

The others immediately followed suit, "Giovanni, an otter skin jacket is going to come for you!"

Giovanni blushed scarlet. No longer aware of whether he was walking or not, he hurried past the group. Then he spotted Campanella in their midst. Campanella was silent and smiling a little out of pity. He looked at Giovanni as though he guessed he would be angry.

Giovanni dodged those eyes as though he were fleeing them. A moment after he had passed by Campanella's tall frame, he heard the boys all start each on his own to whistle. As Giovanni turned the corner, he glanced back and saw Zanelli looking at him. Then Campanella, whistling even louder, walked away. A wave of inexpressible loneliness passed through Giovanni and he suddenly started to run. Some little children who were making a rumpus as they hopped about on one foot with their hands clapped over their ears thought Giovanni was running for the fun of it and shouted excitedly. Giovanni ran on.

He did not, however, climb back up the slope and return directly to his mother's house among the cedars. Instead, he ran off toward the northern outskirts of the town. He could see a bit of river bank looking dim and white. There was a stream spanned by a bridge with a narrow iron railing.

—I have no place to go and play. Everyone treats me as though I were a skulking fox.—

Giovanni stopped on the bridge and stood for a while fighting back the urge to cry as he whistled shakily between gasps of breath. Then, abruptly, he took off at a gallop again.

The Pillar of the Weather Wheel

Behind the river there was a hill, not a very steep one. Beneath the stars of the northern Big Bear the smooth, black summit seemed hazy and, more than usual, to be gently linked to hills beyond.

Giovanni began to climb quickly up the little wooded path

already wet with dew. Between the inky-black clumps of grass and dense bushes in various shapes, the little path shone, a white strand in the starlight. In the undergrowth were small insects with flashing blue lights. When a leaf happened to be lit up all blue-green from behind, it made Giovanni think of the crow gourd lanterns the boys had been carrying.

As he came out of the pitch-black woods of pine and oak, the sky suddenly opened out before him, vast and empty. He could see the Milky Way stretching with a soft white light from south to north, and he could make out the pillar of the weather wheel on the summit. Flowers, perhaps bell flowers or wild chrysanthemums, were blooming everywhere with a scent belonging to a dream. A solitary bird passed over the hill, calling as it flew.

Giovanni came up to the foot of the weather wheel pillar that stood at the summit. Warm from running, he threw himself down in the cold grass.

The lights of the town shone at the bottom of the darkness like the dragon palace at the bottom of the sea. The children's whistling, their voices in song, and torn fragments of their cries reached his ears faintly. The wind made a noise in the distance and the grass on the slope rustled softly. Giovanni's sweat-drenched shirt already felt chilled. Staring up at the Milky Way, he began to think.

—I want to go far away. I want to leave everyone behind and go away, on and on forever. But if Campanella came with me, and the two of us went on and on forever, sketching the fields and all the various houses and everything as we went, that would be wonderful. I'm certain Campanella isn't angry with me, and I want a friend so much. If Campanella became my friend for sure and never lied to me, I'd be willing to give my life for him. But even though I've thought of telling him that, these days I can't bring myself to say it to him. We wouldn't even have time to play together. I want to fly off all by myself far, far away into the sky.—

From the direction of the fields he could hear the sound of a train. The windows of the little train were a tiny row of red. When Giovanni considered that inside there were people on a journey laughing, peeling apples, doing all sorts of things, he felt unbearably lonely and shifted his gaze once again to the sky. The blue star of Lyra stretched out its legs like a mushroom. Splitting into first three, then four, it twinkled busily.

“Ah, that white band is a river of milk. . . .”

[Here five pages are missing from the original manuscript.]

. . . He was still gazing at that blue star.

But no matter how much he looked, the sky did not seem to be the cold empty place the Professor had described. Quite the contrary; the longer he looked the more he could not help feeling that it was a little world complete with things like woods and farms. Then Giovanni again saw the blue star of Lyra twinkling brightly as it split first into three, then into four. Again and again these star pieces stretched out and then contracted their legs until, eventually, they were like mushrooms all long and extended.

The Milky Way Station

—*A while ago too it looked just like that.*—

Before he had time to whisper his thoughts, Giovanni was startled to find that the blue-green light, which until a moment ago had been in the shape of hazy mushrooms, had suddenly taken on the form of a sharply defined triangular marker. For a while it pulsed on and off like a firefly, until at last it stood tall and motionless against the deep steel-blue field of sky. There it stood, straight as straight, clear as clear against the expanse of sky that was like a sheet of blue steel just pulled from the tempering furnace.

Without thinking, Giovanni shouted out, “It’s just too strange! Light can’t turn into a triangular marker that looks like it’s made of chocolate or something!”

Then, as though in answer, from far, far off in the mist, Giovanni heard a low, rumbling voice that sounded like a cello.

“What we call light is a form of energy. Everything, even candy and triangular markers, consists of compounds of energy further and variously compounded together. Thus, provided the rules allow for it, there are times when light turns into candy. It is just that, up until now, you were in a place where those were not the rules. You see, here the convention is completely different.”

Feeling strange, not knowing whether he had understood or not, Giovanni peered into the mist.

Then he heard a strange voice that seemed to come from neither front nor behind, or from anywhere at all, calling out, “Milky Way Station! Milky Way Station!” The odd thing about it was that even though the words were unfamiliar to Giovanni, he had no trouble understanding the meaning.

—So, that really is a triangular marker. There's even a surveyor's flag with the figure of a swan on it fluttering at the top.—Just as these thoughts passed through his mind, everything before his eyes became suddenly bright as though the light from a trillion phosphorescent squid had been frozen at the same instant and dropped down into the sky, or as though a diamond company had pretended it was not making a good haul and had hoarded its diamonds in hopes of keeping the price high, but someone had suddenly turned the cache upside down and scattered diamonds everywhere. Dazzled, Giovanni rubbed his eyes over and over again. In fact, the light had turned into a broad white sash. Sending out branches here, and forking there, it flowed in soft whiteness from north to south across the fields of the sky.

—I believe water's flowing over the surface of those shining pebbles.—No sooner had this thought entered Giovanni's mind, than the same cello-like voice responded.

“Water is flowing? Are you sure it is water?”

Giovanni stretched up as high as he could, trying to see into the water of the river of heaven, but he could not make it out clearly.

"I really can't tell whether it's water or what it is," Giovanni murmured to himself. "But I'm sure it's flowing. Come to think of it, it doesn't seem very different from the wind, because it's so transparent and looks so light."

He had a sense that somewhere, very far away, there was a joyous hand clap.

He looked again and saw the beautiful water, more transparent than glass or even hydrogen, flowing soundlessly on. It might have been a trick of the eyes, but at times the water seemed to form tiny purple ripples or to shine like a rainbow. In the fields here and there stood beautiful phosphorescent triangular markers. The far ones were small and sharply etched in orange and yellow. The near ones were large and had a slightly hazy, pale blue light. Set in various configurations, some triangular, some rectangular, some in the shape of a lightning bolt or loop of chain, they filled the fields with their light. Giovanni's heart pounded. He shook his head again and again. Then the beautiful triangular markers, shining blue and orange and all sorts of colors over the fields, trembled lightly and quivered as though each were breathing.

"I've come to the fields of heaven," Giovanni whispered to himself. "But haven't I been sleeping here all this time? I didn't get here by walking through these fields. I'm trying to think of what happened on the way but I can't remember a thing."

Suddenly looking around him, Giovanni found that the noisy little train he had been riding on for some time now was continuing on its way. In fact, Giovanni was seated looking out the window of a narrow-gauge railway car. It was night and the carriage was lit by a row of small yellow lights. The seats in the carriage were covered with plush blue cloth, and were almost all empty. Only six or seven people, dressed in loose-fitting Arabian-style cloth-

ing, sat reading books or adjusting their glasses. Two big brass buttons gleamed on the shiny gray enamel wall across from Giovanni.

Giovanni, however, turned his glance closer to hand and suddenly noticed in the seat immediately in front of him a tall boy wearing a black jacket that looked wet. The boy's head was thrust out of the train window and he was gazing at the scene outside. Something about the boy's shoulders looked familiar and Giovanni burned with impatience to know who he was. Just as Giovanni was about to stick his own head out the window, the other boy suddenly withdrew his and looked in Giovanni's direction.

It was Campanella, the class leader.

[At this point, the story continues on page 26 of the main translation. A few discrepancies remain between the two versions in this central section, but they are slight. The earlier and later versions diverge again only toward the end of the tale at the point where Giovanni, realizing that Campanella is no longer on the train, bursts into tears. What follows is a translation of that very different ending. It continues from page 76.]

Close of the Early Version

“What, exactly, are you crying about? Here, look this way.” Behind him Giovanni heard the same strange cello-like voice he had noticed on occasion earlier.

Startled, he wiped his tears and turned in the direction of the voice. In what until a moment before had been Campanella's seat sat a thin grown-up with a pale face and big black hat. He was smiling softly, and held a large book in his hands.

“You are upset because your friend has disappeared, isn't that right? As a matter of fact this evening Campanella went very far

away indeed. It would be quite useless for you to search for him.”

“But why is that? I made a promise to keep right on going with Campanella.”

“Ah, yes indeed. That is the way everyone thinks. But you cannot go together. And what’s more, everyone is Campanella. Anyone you chance to meet, whoever they might be, is someone with whom you have already shared a journey any number of times, eating apples together and riding on trains. It is wisest, therefore, to do as you thought earlier and seek the best happiness of all people, going there as quickly as possible together. Only in that way is it really possible for you to go on forever with Campanella.”

“I will certainly do as you say. But how should I seek for this best happiness?”

“Ah, I am searching for that answer myself. You must hold tight to your ticket and also devote yourself to study. You learned some chemistry, didn’t you? You know that water is made up of oxygen and hydrogen. No one questions that today; you need only perform an experiment to see that it is so. In the past, however, people argued all sorts of things—that water was composed of mercury and salt, or mercury and sulfur, and so on.

“Well then, everyone claims their own god to be the true god, isn’t that so? And yet people can be moved to tears by the deeds of those who believe in a god other than their own. Also, people dispute whether we human beings are at heart good or evil. The argument is never settled, is it? If you, however, really study and, by means of scientific experiment, clearly distinguish true thinking from false thinking, if you can just determine the method for such an experiment, then faith will become like chemistry.

“But, here, have a look at this book. It is an encyclopedia of geography and history. On this page of the book, you see, we have the geography and history of 2200 B.C. Examine it closely. What is written here is not what existed in 2200 B.C., but what

everyone thought to be geography and history at the time. Thus, this one page corresponds to an entire volume of history and geography. Do you follow me? Now, the things that are written here were for the most part true in 2200 B.C. If you look, you'll find evidence supporting this popping up left and right. But try doubting it a little . . . You see, you've arrived at the next page, the year 1000 B.C. Both geography and history have changed quite a bit, haven't they? At that time it was this way. No need to look so skeptical! Why, even our bodies, our thoughts, the Milky Way, the train, history, are simply what we feel them to be. Look here, why don't you try calming your emotions a bit together with me? Won't you try?"

The man raised one finger and then lowered it gently. As he did so, Giovanni saw himself, his thoughts, the train, his scholarly looking companion, the heavenly river, everything all together suddenly explode with light, then disappear in utter silence, then flash brilliantly and disappear again. With each burst of light all possible worlds spread out endlessly before him, all possible histories were present, with each lapse into darkness it was all empty. The process repeated itself, gradually speeding up until before long, things were exactly as they were at the start.

"Well, shall we stop there? You see now how your experiment must encompass everything from the very start to the finish of these isolated moments of thought. That is a very difficult thing. Of course, you can only be accountable for the thoughts of the particular time in which you find yourself. Look, you can see the Pleiades over there. It is up to you to 'loose the chain of the Pleiades.' "

At that moment from a spot beyond the pitch-black horizon a beacon fire shot upward burning with the brightness of midday and filling the railway carriage with light. The beacon continued to burn, reaching higher and higher until it grazed the sky. . . .

—*The Magellanic Nebula! Yes, for my sake, for my mother's*

sake, for Campanella's sake, for the sake of everyone, I certainly will search for the really true happiness. . . .—

Giovanni stood gazing at the Magellanic Nebula, his face tense with resolve. . . .

—*The one with supreme happiness, for that one's sake. . . .—*

“Hold tight to your ticket. Soon you will no longer be on this dream railway but must walk boldly with straight, unswerving strides through the fire and violent waves of the real world. By all means do not lose your ticket, the only true ticket in the whole Milky Way.”

No sooner had the cello-like voice finished speaking than Giovanni found the river of heaven growing more and more distant. Soon he discovered himself standing straight and tall on the grassy knoll with the wind blowing around him. In the distance he heard the steps of Professor Bulcaniro approaching quietly.

“My thanks to you! I have completed a most satisfactory experiment. I had long wanted to make use of just this sort of quiet spot in order to experiment with transmitting my thoughts to another person over a distance. Everything you said is recorded in my notebook. Please return home now and rest. You must advance unswervingly just as you resolved to do in your dream. And please come to see me at any time if there is anything you would like to discuss.”

“I promise to keep on going straight ahead and to search for the true happiness,” Giovanni vowed.

“Well then, I bid you goodbye. Here is your ticket from the trip.” The professor slipped a piece of green paper folded small into Giovanni’s pocket. Then his figure disappeared around the far side of the weather wheel pole.

Giovanni raced down the slope. He noticed that his pocket was very heavy and kept making a clinking noise. Stopping in the woods to have a look, he found wrapped inside the strange celestial ticket from his dream two large coins.

"Professor, thank you! . . . I'm on my way home with the milk, Mother!" Giovanni shouted, breaking into a run again.

Suddenly all sorts of things came crowding into his chest and he had a feeling that was new to him with a sadness to it he could not name.

The star of Lyra, slipped far down in the west now, once again extended its mushroom-like legs.

Sources and Notes

The following notes are supplementary in nature. They are designed to provide a space for additional comment to the material presented in the body of this book. They are also intended to point the reader to original sources in cases where those sources directly inform what is written.

All citations are in the social science style, giving author, date, and page. Full bibliographic references can be found in the bibliography.

In referring to Kenji's works, I have used the monumental variorum edition of the complete works, the *Kōhon Miyazawa Kenji zenshū*, published by Chikuma Shobō (1973–77). Throughout the notes this has been abbreviated as KMKZ. On occasion, I also cite the more popularly presented version of the complete works, the *Shinshū Miyazawa Kenji zenshū* (1980), abbreviated as SMKZ.

Introduction

First and foremost, something should be said about the name, Miyazawa Kenji. In Japan it is customary to give the family name first and the personal name second. I have followed this usage throughout in referring to any Japanese name. Thus, Miyazawa is Kenji's family name while Kenji is his given name. Kenji is exceptional among writers in Japan in that he is referred to by his personal name even though that name is not a literary soubriquet. The

effect is rather like referring to Agatha Christie as Agatha; one feels at once more affection toward and intimacy with the author.

E. M. Forster's "The Celestial Omnibus" (1947) and Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Celestial Railroad" represent examples of narratives similar to *Night of the Milky Way Railway* in their use of the motif of a heavenly journey, but are very dissimilar to Kenji's story in tone.

Niikura (1984) compares *Night of the Milky Way Railway* to *The Divine Comedy*.

Po Chü-i's poem is "The Everlasting Sorrow" (Ch'ang hen ko). The Taoist priest summoned by the emperor to seek out the spirit of Yang T'ai-chen finds her on an "enchanted isle," a common refuge for Taoist immortals. There are many English translations of "The Everlasting Sorrow." See Bynner and Kiang (1929, pp. 120–25). While somewhat skeptical of the poem's artistic greatness, both Waley (1949, p. 44) and Schafer (1977, p. 244) attest to its enormous and enduring popularity.

Night of the Milky Way Railway

This translation of *Night of the Milky Way Railway* is based on Kenji's later version of the story given in the variorum edition of the complete works (KMKZ 10, pp. 123–71). I also consulted and, at points, followed the edition in the recently reedited complete works (SMKZ 12, pp. 90–161). The two editions differ in only very minor ways; the variorum edition is more faithful to the original manuscript, while, in the recently reedited version a few modest liberties have been taken to make the text more readable.

Reader's Guide

Chapter 1: The Afternoon Lesson

Ono Ryūshō (1979, p. 227) has commented that Campanella's name is perhaps based on the Italian, *compagno*, meaning "companion." Hara Shirō in his monumental glossarial dictionary of

Kenji's vocabulary presents a dazzling array of possible sources for both Giovanni's name and Campanella's (1989, pp. 161–62, 351–52). Of the many hypotheses offered, I find most convincing the suggestion that Kenji based Campanella's name on that of the seventeenth-century utopian social philosopher Tommaso Campanella. It seems wisest to leave Giovanni as everyman, but it is possible, as Hara points out, to make a connection between Giovanni and St. John the Baptist. This would leave open the possibility of a rather delightful association between Kenji's Centaurus festival and the magic of St. John's night.

The note relating to subatomic particles and the properties of a vacuum is found in KMKZ (12A, p. 612). For information on the history of the theory of the shape of the universe, I am grateful to my colleague, Eric Wollman, who also directed me to Milton K. Munitz's book (1957). Hara (1989, pp. 22, 750) has tracked down the original source for Kenji's lens metaphor in a scientific compendium by a Western scientist.

See KMKZ (2, p. 154) for the original text of the lines from "Aomori Elegy." Mita (1984, pp. 3–5) gives an interesting analysis of Kenji's apple-shaped universe based on this passage. Hagiwara (1986, pp. 169–72) expands upon Mita's theories with specific reference to *Night of the Milky Way Railway*.

Chapter 2: At the Printer's

Kusaka (1975, pp. 60, 160) presents an unannotated but impressively fulsome list of different cultural views of the Milky Way as a pathway for departed souls. Similar accounts are given in the *Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend* (Leach 1950, p. 726).

The information about traditional Tanabata and Obon practices in Hanamaki is based on Ogawa Kanehide's engaging account (1987, pp. 118–26). Irisawa, among others, points out the clear connection between the lanterns of *Night of the Milky Way*

Railway and *tōrōnagashi* at Obon (Irisawa and Amazawa 1979, p. 20). Andō Motō (1980, p. 51) comments on the correspondence between the river dotted with floating lamps and the starry sky.

Chapter 3: Home

The essay “The English Coast” is included among Kenji’s stories in KMKZ (9, pp. 35–47). The passage from “Koiwai Farm” is also from KMKZ (2, p. 83).

Amazawa (1976, p. 60) comments on the significance of the Sakhalin specimens in the context of Kenji’s attitude toward the extreme north and his fanciful city of Bering. The passage from Mita (1984), whose inspiration from Amazawa is clearly acknowledged, is found on page 21.

Chapter 4: The Night of the Centaurus Festival

Saitō’s brief but very informative essay (1985b, pp. 84–85) is found in a collection of similar pieces all pertaining to specific details of *Night of the Milky Way Railway*. This collection was brought out as a special issue of *Taiyō* in 1985. While *Taiyō*’s reputation is as a popular journal, the essays in this special issue contain much fresh material by recognized scholars in the field. Saitō’s essay is one of several from this collection that I have found helpful in annotating Kenji’s often puzzling text.

The verse about the German spruce is found in KMKZ (1, p. 212). Kenji mentions “temporary death” in the KMKZ (2, p. 45), while the story “Diamond of the Ten Sacred Powers” is from KMKZ (7, pp. 198–99).

Nakamura Setsuya’s research on the “Song of the Circling Stars” was reported on in the *Asahi shimbun* (evening edition) (May 9, 1990). The musical notation for the song is included in KMKZ (6, p. 645). The story itself is in KMKZ (7, p. 27).

Chapter 5: The Pillar of the Weather Wheel

Yoshimi's description (1982, p. 28) of the *hōrin* of the Shōanji is based on information given him by the current head priest, Ogawa Kanehide. Elsewhere, Ogawa gives his own explanation of the interesting wheel (1987, pp. 118–20). The two accounts differ in minor details only. Both accounts state that the original wheel was still standing in Kenji's day. According to Ogawa's own report, the present wheel was erected in 1972 at the recommendation of Kenji's brother, Miyazawa Seiroku.

The poem that includes a reference to the weather wheel is found in KMKZ (5, p. 160). Among the several scholars who provide new interpretations of the *mysterious wheel* are Betsuyaku Minoru, who makes reference to a Brueghel painting (1985, p. 19), and Saitō Bun'ichi, who refers to an image from the *Lotus Sutra* (1985a, p. 21). Nemoto, too, gives a concise account (1985, p. 20) of his scientifically minded theory of the weather wheel in the *Taiyō* special issue.

Chapter 6: The Milky Way Station

Ozawa Toshirō (1987, pp. 211–14) has written about the former Iwate Light Railway. Mita (1984, p. 38) writes eloquently on the subject of the significance of turn-of-the-century train travel. Onda Itsuo's religious interpretation (1981, p. 258) draws on a much older stratum of culture.

For practical information on astronomy, both here and elsewhere, I consulted *A Field Guide to the Stars and Planets* (Menzel 1964). The information on the history of the term Northern Cross is from Kusaka (1975, pp. 161–62). The poetry quoted is from the third rough draft of poem 179 of the second volume of *Spring and Asura* (Haru to shura) (KMKZ 3, p. 474).

Umeki Mariko of the Miyazawa Kenji Kinen-kan outside of Hanamaki was of assistance to me in numerous ways when I visited in June of 1988. At my urging, she directed me to her

article in the Kinen-kan collection (Umeki 1987). During that same visit to Hanamaki in June of 1988, Miyazawa Seiroku kindly shared with me his reminiscence of Takamura Kōtarō's comment about the "river of silver."

Chapter 7: The Northern Cross and the Pliocene Coast

I found Hurlbut (1976) to be helpful in explaining geological terms.

Miyazawa Seiroku's comments about the walnuts are found in his book (1987, p. 142). The geologist and Kenji scholar Miyagi Kazuo (1985, p. 126) provides information about the original discovery of the walnut fossils.

Chapter 8: The Bird Catcher

Kuwabara Noriyoshi (1987, p. 59), Ōmi Masato (1987, pp. 96, 98), and Serizawa Shunsuke (1983, pp. 31–32), among others, have written about the bird catcher, but the figure remains elusive. Mita's theory (1984, pp. 87–121) of the importance of the social guilt Kenji experienced is very persuasive.

Irisawa notes that birds frequently serve as bearers of the souls of the dead in Japanese myth (Irisawa and Amazawa 1979, p. 38). "The White Birds" is found in the first volume of *Spring and Asura* (KMKZ 2, pp. 148–50).

Chapter 9: Giovanni's Ticket

Kusaka (1975, p. 162) explains the astronomy behind Kenji's observatory. Astronomer Eric Wollman (personal communication) confirms that Albireo A had only recently been discovered to be a binary star (a binary within a binary) in the early 1920s.

Kenji's cousin, Seki Tokuya (1970, p. 104), tells the story of the

installation of the mandala. Irisawa (1983, p. 26) points out the possible connection between Giovanni's ticket and the Nichiren *daihonzon*. SMKZ (7, p. 477) presents the early version with the handkerchief in a readable format. Throughout this study I have relied on Nakamura Hajime (1981) for explanations of Buddhist terminology.

Mita (1984, pp. 22–25) writes about Kenji's familiarity with Einstein's theory of relativity and the concept of the fourth dimension. Irisawa (1977, p. 66, n. 2) first drew attention to the memos that include Einstein and Minkowski's names. The Einstein memo is found in KMKZ (3, p. 488). KMKZ (11, pp. 543–44) provides a note about the Minkowski memo.

When I spoke with him in June of 1988, Professor Sugiura Shizuka of Ōtsuma Women's College pointed out to me Kenji's interest in Kimura. Ono (1979, pp. 203–4) also makes note of it. The quoted passage is from Kimura's *Treatise on Early Buddhist Thought* (1922, pp. 181–82).

To understand better the cosmology of the *Abhidharmakośa* I consulted La Vallée Poussin's French translation (1971, pp. 119, 164–65) as well as the version Kenji most likely used in the *Kokuyaku Daizōkyō* (Abidatsuma Kusha-ron 11, pp. 478–595).

Kusaka (1975, p. 162) comments on Kenji's depiction of Altair.

The passage of poetry that refers to the sinking of the Titanic is in KMKZ (3, p. 172).

Saitō (1976, p. 192) provides information on the Magellanic nebulae.

Sugaya Kikuo (1980, p. 97) links the fragrant apples to a notion of utopia. He points out that the huskless rice of the Milky Way, which is fragrant and "ten times bigger than normal," is more like berries than grain, and is easy to eat.

The *locus classicus* for the Buddhist myth of the origin of agriculture is the *Dīga Nikāya* (Davids 1899–1921, pp. 79–94).

The *Abhidharmakośa* presents a related version (La Vallée Poussin 1971, pp. 204–6).

Hara (1989, p. 260) raises the interesting point that, according to Western star lore, the lyre that gives this constellation its name belongs to Orpheus, the musician who failed in his effort to reclaim his beloved from the underworld.

Itaya Hideki (1987, pp. 146–47) expresses disappointment at the matter-of-fact depiction of the peacocks in this passage of *Night of the Milky Way Railway*, in contrast to the bird's portrayal elsewhere in Kenji's stories where the association with traditional Pure Land imagery is more strongly felt. It should be noted that there is indeed a constellation known as the Peacock (Pavo), but it lies near the south celestial pole and thus is a considerable distance away from Lyra on the star charts. It is not at all clear that Kenji had Pavo in mind here.

The poem on two thousand years of farming is from KMKZ (6, p. 190). The memo about the “public-spirited person” is found in KMKZ (9, p. 356).

Satō Yasuhira (1985, p. 69) mentions the connection between the “New World Symphony” and Hiawatha. Hara (1989, pp. 271, 362–63) points out that in a draft of the poem “Taneyama-gahara,” Kenji uses the Colorado plateau as an image for the Kitakami uplands through which the Iwate Light Railway (the recognized model for the Milky Way Railway) ran. Certainly, the poet's portrayal of himself in this poem as an early Indian of the Colorado bedecked in white feathers comes strikingly close to the scene in *Night of the Milky Way Railway*. Hara also shows a link between a Victor Records release of the largo movement of the “New World Symphony” conducted by Joseph Pasternack and Kenji's fanciful treatment of the Iwate Light Railway.

Kusaka (1975, p. 163) provides information about Lambda and Upsilon Scorpii. “The Twin Stars” is found in KMKZ (7, pp. 19–37), while “The Fourth Letter” is in KMKZ (11, pp. 319–21).

Ōmi (1987, p. 96) points out that Kenji might have borrowed the technique of obscuring mist from Maurice Maeterlinck's play, "L'Oiseau bleu." Ueda Akira (1985, p. 150) describes Kenji's contact with Christianity.

Amazawa mentions the electric squirrels twice (Irisawa and Amazawa, 1979, pp. 47–48; Amazawa, 1985, p. 88).

Saitō (1976, p. 278; 1985b, p. 85) comments on the Coal Sack. Hara (1989, p. 395) provides an impressive list of the contemporary authorities on astronomy Kenji was likely to have consulted. His evidence indicates a general uncertainty at the time as to whether the black nebulae were holes or obscuring clouds. The passage of poetry that mentions the "terrible window of the Milky Way" is found in KMKZ (3, p. 483).

Acknowledging a debt to Ozawa Toshirō (1987, 1, pp. 206–39), Tsuzukihashi Tatsuo (1988, pp. 84–86) writes about the connection between Kenji's quest for the "true happiness of everyone" and various experiences involving death.

The passage that begins "everyone is Campanella" is found in KMKZ (9, p. 141). The quotation from "The Fourth Letter" is also from KMKZ (11, p. 320).

Onda (1981, pp. 314–42) argues convincingly on Kenji's negative feeling toward rivers. "Blue People in the Water's Flow" is found among Kenji's tanka for 1918 (KMKZ 1, pp. 89–90). Horio gives an account of the drowning accident in the Toyozawa River (1985, p. 124).

Background to the Story

Readers might be curious about other English translations of *Night of the Milky Way Railway*. Roger Pulvers serialized a translation of *Night of the Milky Way Railway* for the English language *Mainichi Daily News* in 1983. In 1984 an abridged version by S. J. Sigrist (1984, pp. 174–83) was published in the *Japan Quarterly*. More recently, John Bester has done a transla-

tion entitled *Night Train to the Stars* (1987, pp. 7–97) for the Kodansha English Library. Bester's translation, presented in a format aimed at students of English in Japan, follows the older Tanikawa edition and does not make a distinction between the earlier and later versions.

Night of the Milky Way Railway has seen repeated publication as an illustrated storybook for children. Nevertheless, debate has continued for some time among critics as to whether a book so seemingly difficult and with such serious subject matter can actually be a children's story. See Taguchi (1987, p. 217).

For information on Kenji's biography I have relied principally upon Horio (1966, 1985), Mori (1974), Sakai (1975), Satō Takafusa (1951), and Seki (1970). His letters, reproduced in KMKZ (vol. 13), are another important source. The 1912 letter that describes the comfort Kenji feels in the Buddha's protective presence is from KMKZ (13, p. 12). Toshiko's life is rarely treated as an independent subject, although Satō Hiroshi (1984) does make an attempt to do so. Yoshimi (1982, p. 108) mentions the brother's and sister's shared interest in rock collecting.

The Japan Women's Academy (Nihon Joshi Daigakkō) that Toshiko attended later became the well-known Japan Women's University (Nihon Joshi Daigaku).

The most detailed account of Toshiko's illness and death is provided by Mori (1974, pp. 148–56), who interviewed Hosokawa Kiyo, the nurse who looked after Toshiko in her final months.

The three “Voiceless Lament” (Musei Dōkoku) poems are found in Kenji's first collection of free verse poems, *Spring and Asura* (Haru to shura), which he published at his own expense in 1924 (see KMKZ 2, pp. 136–43). The passage beginning “Before the day ends . . . ” is from “Pine Needles” (Matsu no hari) (KMKZ 2, p. 140).

Although much of Kenji's poetry, like the verses of the “Voiceless Lament” section, is dated, we need to be very careful

in assessing what the dates mean. Most often the date Kenji gives seems intended to indicate the time when the thoughts and images mentioned in the poem were first experienced by the poet. In this case, since the three poems are about Toshiko dying, they bear the date of her death. It is important to keep in mind, however, that for Kenji, who was forever revising and rewriting, any one draft of a poem might have been made days, months, and even years after the date assigned.

The passage of poetry beginning, “Two large white birds . . .” is from “The White Birds” (Shiroi tori) (KMKZ 2, pp. 148–49).

I quote Mita (1984, p. 14) on the import of Kenji’s August journey.

“Koma peak, Koma peak . . .” is from “Volcano Bay: A Nocturne” (Funkawan—Nokutān) (KMKZ 2, p. 183). The line quoted from “Aomori Elegy” (Aomori banka) is from KMKZ (2, p. 166).

The psychological strains of mourning are expressed with painful clarity in many of the poems from August 1923. In “Sōya Elegy” (Sōya banka), for example, the poet vows, at a sign from his dead sister, to jump over the side of the ship in which he is traveling (KMKZ 2, pp. 248–54).

The passage that begins “Are they real or not . . .” is from a version of “In the starry sky that fills the north . . .” (Kitta ippai no hoshizora ni . . .) (KMKZ 3, pp. 483–84). It is interesting to note that Fritjof Capra, who shares Kenji’s fascination in the correspondence between Eastern mysticism and modern physics, cites D. T. Suzuki in recognizing the Avatamsaka sutra as the “culmination of Buddhist thought” (1975, pp. 98–99).

Irisawa and Amazawa (1979, p. 174) provide a note on the nuances of Kenji’s term, *kairōsei*. The poem itself is found in KMKZ (3, pp. 105–7). It was this same team of poet-editors who saved the poem itself from a very narrow brush with oblivion. Kenji

had originally written “Elegiac Blue” in pencil on the back of a sheet of musical notation paper, and later erased the entire poem. Irisawa and Amazawa, who had become expert at reading Kenji’s hand in the course of their editing of his collected works, were able to discern what Kenji had written in the faint pencil markings left behind (KMKZ 3, p. 465; Irisawa and Amazawa, pp. 173–74).

Irisawa (1983, p. 21) presents the evidence and arguments for establishing the summer or fall of 1924 as the time when Kenji first began to write *Night of the Milky Way Railway*.

Kenji’s note on Campanella’s death is in KMKZ (10, p. 357).

Another Night of the Milky Way Railway

Irisawa (1983, pp. 16–29) gives an account of the various editions of *Night of the Milky Way Railway* that have appeared and comments on Kenji’s method of composition.

Kirstin Vidaeus (1985–86, p. 26) has commented on the “wide psychological distance” between Giovanni and Campanella in the earlier version. Two critics in particular, Sugawara Chieko and Gamō Yoshirō (cited in Amazawa 1976, pp. 157–64; and Satō Yasumasa 1981, p. 106), have argued that Kenji’s friendship with a classmate from the Morioka Agricultural School, Hosaka Kanai, and his parting from that friend had a shaping influence on the writing of *Night of the Milky Way Railway*.

In giving evidence of Giovanni’s extraordinary loneliness, critics most often cite the lines from the earlier version in which Giovanni declares, “I have no place to go and play. Everyone treats me as though I were a skulking fox.” In this case, the word “fox” carries its full traditional Japanese connotation of a mysterious and rather malevolent creature outside the pale of human society (Fromm 1980, p. 264; Amazawa 1987b, p. 53; Manda

1973, p. 198; Nakamura Minoru 1972, p. 136).

The translation of the earlier version is based on the text in KMKZ (9, pp. 99–144).

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Except where otherwise noted, all Japanese works noted below were published in Tokyo.

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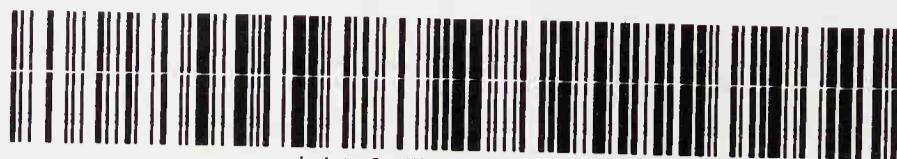
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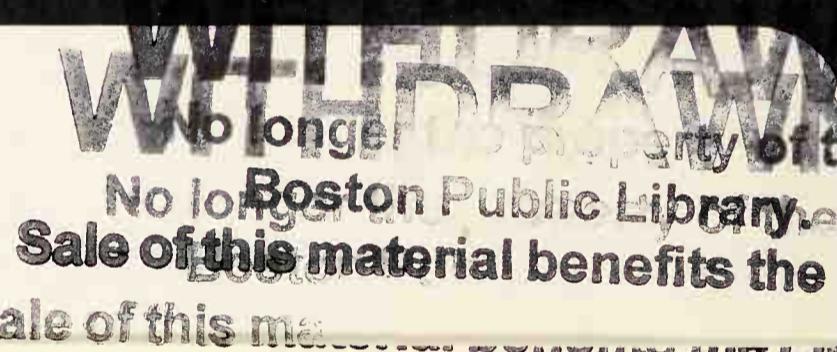


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"Night of the Milky Way Railway stands with boyish exuberance in the small but elite company of great fantasies of the afterlife. With its Buddhist, rather than Judeo-Christian, underpinnings it offers a fresh appeal to Western readers; here nothing can be taken for granted, even the seemingly familiar yields surprise.

"It is important to note that Giovanni, in contrast to all his fellow passengers on the Milky Way Railway, holds an extraordinary ticket enabling an eventual return to our mundane, three-dimensional world. By virtue of his imaginative power and craft as a writer, Miyazawa Kenji is able to turn and offer Giovanni's ticket to us all. The journey that awaits the reader is both uncanny and beautiful. One is unlikely to return from such travels unchanged."

From the Introduction by Sarah M. Strong

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